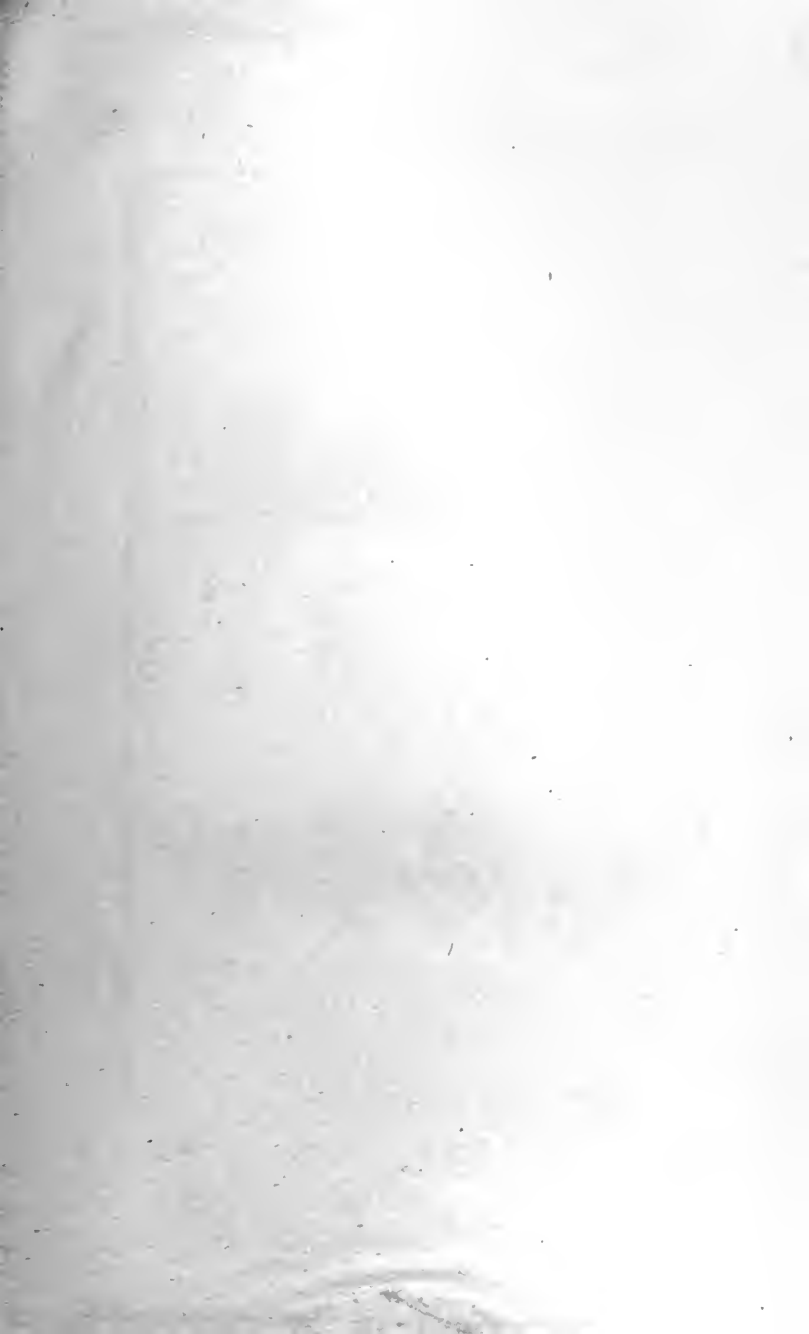




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21 Bedford Street, W.C.

The House in Demetrius Road

By
J. D. Beresford

Author of "Jacob Stahl," "Goslings," etc.



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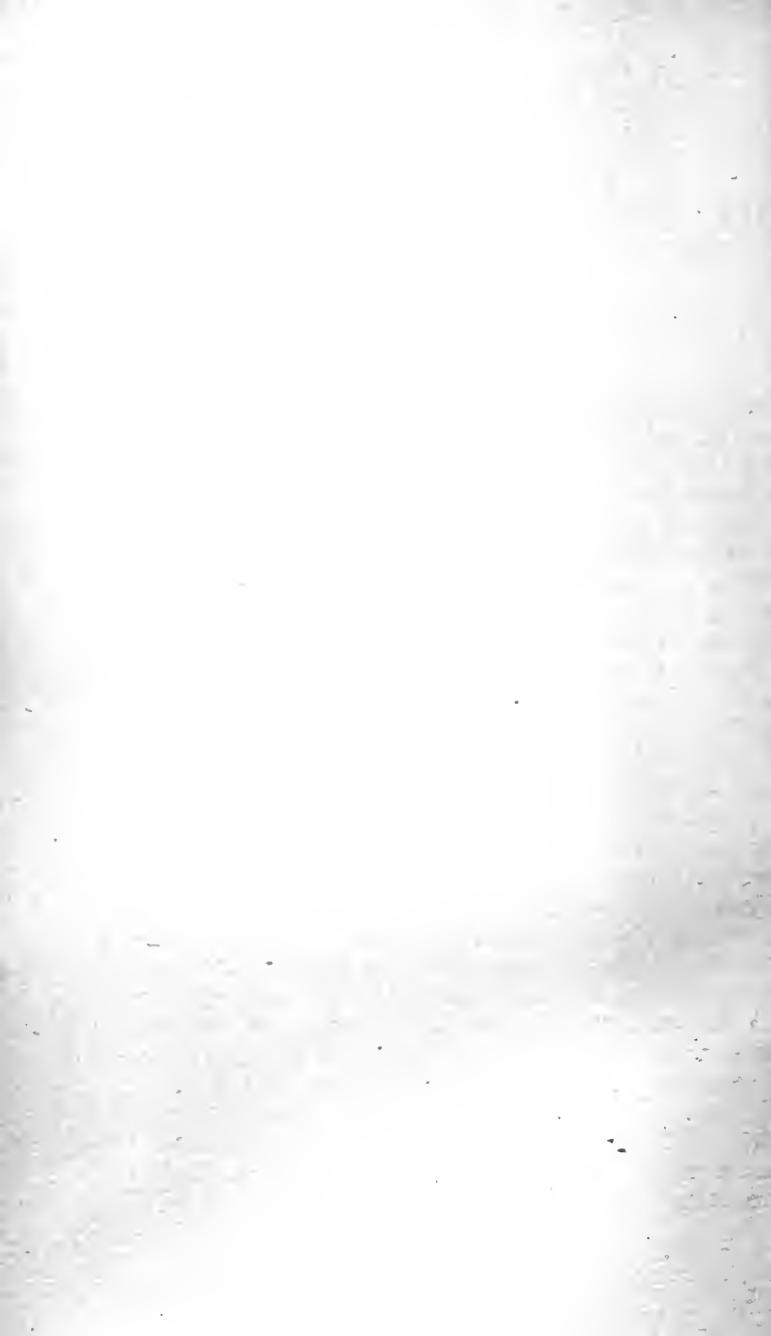
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THE HOUSE IN DEMETRIUS ROAD



THE HOUSE IN DEMETRIUS ROAD

I. GARROCH.

I

EVERY house in Demetrius Road was severely separated from its neighbour by a strip of park fencing, six feet high. Between fence and house on one side, a narrow path squeezed its way to a door invisible from the road, a door whose functions were clearly indicated by the advertisement "Tradesman's Entrance," labelling the side gate. The larger gate, in two leaves, that opened on to a path almost wide enough for a carriage drive, bore the name of the house on each post.

Martin Bond, conscious that he was a little late for his appointment, was irritated by the necessity for keeping an eye on each side of the road; irritated also by the ostentation of the names that described so ill these modern suburban villas. They were all so recent, not only in material but in style. They showed the influence of the new movement in suburban architecture. No house was an exact replica of its neighbour. "Features" proclaimed themselves; a veranda borne on little stubby wooden columns, a flat segmental bay window, an excess of roof thrusting down to low walls apparently upheld by diminutive triangles of rough-cast buttress; each made some bid for distinction. But the names on the gate posts bespoke the individual tastes of owners uninfluenced by the spirit of the style. Hatfield, Oakleigh, Carn Voel, were representative titles, varied occasionally by a Nest or Retreat. Martin Bond had nearly reached the bottom of the road before he came to Garroch.

At first sight its studied dissimilarity to the houses on either side proclaimed its kinship to every other villa in the road; but here, at last, was a more real distinction. In all this trim elaborate newness, Garroch alone wore an air of neglect. Its gate stood partly open; its thirty feet of front garden was untended, the short curtains in the segmental bay straggled untidily across the window. Garroch wore no air of primness, no air of pride in the distinction of being set in Demetrius Road.

Martin hesitated with his hand on the rusty latch of the formal gates. The wind had swung the gate against him as he approached, but the latch was caught up and did not fall into its hasp. He fingered the twisted iron ring which served as a handle, and looked up depreciatingly at the slovenly brick and rough-cast front of Garroch. An eaves gutter had leaked and the plaster of the upper floors was marked with long brown streaks, where dribbles of stained water had run in a strange pattern like the sketch of an inverted tree.

It was all so unlike Martin's picture of the house in which he was to find that brilliant young Scotchman, whose potentialities had been so vividly painted by Waterhouse. And now it seemed to Martin in retrospect that he recognized for the first time certain hesitations and reserves in Waterhouse's eulogy. Had there not been the shadow of some enormously qualifying "but" at the end of his every sentence; some hint of a vital contingency that had been abruptly clipped off before it found expression?

The three half-dead little firs, planted haphazard in the rough grass before the house, wagged their heads fiercely in the October wind.

"If I believed in omens," reflected Martin, "I should certainly not go in. The gate bangs in my face and the trees shake their heads at me."

He pushed the gate open abruptly and walked up

to the front door. He noticed that someone had tried in a desultory way to weed the path. The brass of the knocker that formed part of the letter box, was the colour of bronze.

No answer came to his pressure of the little electric button on the side post of the door, nor could he hear the tingling of any tiny bell in response to his effort. He felt inclined to give up the attempt, even now; he could tell Waterhouse that he had called and found no one there. But, as always, when he had cleared the way for retreat, he immediately decided to go on. He lifted the brown knocker and tapped firmly half a dozen times.

The sound of a door opening somewhere within the house, came to him, followed by a pause, and presently the movement of footsteps across the hall. Then came silence again and Martin realized that he was being observed through one of the less opaque panes of coloured glass in the upper panels of the door. At last the door was opened, thrown back with vigour against the "stop" that protected the walls of the lobby. The key fell out of the lock and tinkled on the tiles of the floor.

2

The woman who stood in the doorway was tall, red-haired and wonderfully freckled. She wore a brown apron with a high bib strapped across her shoulders; her bare red forearms were corrugated by the outlines of wiry muscles.

"Well?" she said, staring at Martin.

"Is Mr Greg at home?" he asked. "I've an appointment with him for four o'clock."

"Mister Greg'll no be in," said the woman.

Martin misunderstood her idiom. "Not at all?" he asked. "He wrote to me to make an appointment. I've got his letter here."

4 THE HOUSE IN DEMETRIUS ROAD

"I said he'll no be in just now," replied the woman, still taking stock of the visitor; "but if ye have a letter that'll maybe make a difference. Ye've an honest face; ye can come in and wait. I'll put ye in the drawing-room."

She stooped down, picked up the key from the tiles and replaced it in the lock, and then, turning her back upon Martin, led the way into the hall beyond.

"I'll not be knowing when Mr Greg'll be in," she said. "Will I get ye a cup of tea?"

"Oh, thanks very much," returned Martin; "it's awfully good of you, but perhaps I'd better wait. Mr Greg's sure to be in directly. He said he'd be in at four o'clock."

"Ye'll know best, no doubt," returned the big woman, and left him.

The room in which he sat down to wait was not in character with the outside of the house. A "drawing-room" as described by that oddly-mannered servant, it undoubtedly was; but here was no hint of untidiness or neglect. On the other hand, it was all too scrupulously neat. The baby grand was closed and no litter of music sheets gave any suggestion that the piano was ever opened; all that was evidently kept tight shut in the rosewood cabinet that stood on the floor. The decoration displayed signs of a certain discrimination. The window-seat was covered with chintz, and the art-linen curtains, which alone gave any hint of careless disarrangement, were of a pleasing shade of green. Nor was the furniture itself out of keeping. It was mainly of fumed oak and had a certain solidity of structure and thoughtfulness of design that spoke of taste and pains in selection. Yet the whole room gave Martin an effect of desertion. It was so plainly a room in which no one lived. The fireplace with its neat tile hearth and oak curb, was quite empty, no fire was laid and the very bars at the bottom of the grate were scrupulously black-leaded. The place smelt faintly of furniture and of nothing else.

Martin sat down in the window seat and stared out at the untidy front garden. His attention was held by the gate which swung to and fro with a mournful shriek, or now and then, as if in a spasm of sullen temper, banged resentfully against its retaining post. By that gate, no doubt, Greg must enter, thought Martin.

He was young enough to be intensely resentful and impatient. Those so recent years at Cambridge had left him with a sense of his own importance in the world, and the fifteen months of journalism and settlement work which alone separated him from his University experiences had presented differences of degree rather than of kind.

"Curse this Greg fellow, I don't believe he's any good," was the uppermost thought in Martin's mind.

He looked at his watch and found that it was a quarter to five. He got up and walked impatiently across the room, looking for the bell. He had done all that was necessary; he would leave a message and go. Then the gate slammed again and he went back to the window; but no one was coming up the path. It seemed as if that gate, also, was moodily expectant and impatient.

He returned to the fireplace and was about to press the electric bell when his eye was caught by two photographs on the mantelpiece, photographs of women, probably sisters, mounted in narrow frames of reeded black wood.

One of the two women, plainly the younger, was smiling slightly, the rather formal smile induced by the instructions of the photographer; and it was the face of the older woman that held Martin's attention.

She had dark eyes and heavy dark hair that rolled back from her forehead in waves that held no suggestion of artificial methods. There was more than a hint of sadness in her face, or perhaps of a capacity for suffering, yet there was nothing, Martin thought, of affectation or pose. He looked at the photograph with the eye of an artist, and it pleased him, enthralled him.

He thought that this was at once the most beautiful and intellectual face he had ever seen. He could remember no idealized portrait that had ever made so strong an appeal to him. By some lucky accident the mechanical process had revealed the mind of this woman, he thought; and the very limitations of the reproducing machinery had avoided the possible failures of the living artist. Here was not a personality seen and changed, however subtly, by another human mind, but some glimpse of the very woman herself. An emotion of worship arose in him. He wanted to kneel before this presentation of beauty. He became suddenly conscious how unworthy he was to stand before it.

A flush of shame overwhelmed him as he remembered that experience of two years before. He found no excuse for himself in the fact that he had been only twenty-one. The woman had been so innately common. He had long since forgotten his early ideal of her—her subsequent treatment of him had effectively wiped that from his thought. But he had rather gloried in his early taste of experience. He had told the story of it, in half lights, to mere acquaintances, and, if he had attempted in some way to sentimentalize the whole incident, he had always known that his spirit in the relation had been that of boasting.

Now he was ashamed of himself, willing to defend the memory of that careless, various woman in his excessive condemnation of his own weakness. He had been tempted and fallen. He was weak, stained, impure, altogether unworthy to stand before the presentation of this wonderful soul, who seemed to him to typify the very ideal of purity.

The weary protests of the slamming gate had ceased to penetrate his consciousness, but he was suddenly recalled to the purpose of his visit by the sharp click of a latch, followed by the banging of the front door. Then he heard a clumsy footstep in the hall and a loud voice, shouting roughly for "Hester."

Two minutes later Robin Greg came blundering into the drawing-room. His indeterminately coloured hair was ruffled and one tuft stuck up in a small plume at the top of his head. His collar was crumpled and the band of his flat tie had worked up at the back.

"How d'ye do, Mr Bond," he said, with a certain geniality of tone. "Wotterhoose has told me all about you. I'm vairy sorry I'm so late. I've had a devilish lot of things to do. Come into the study. I don't know what that wumman put ye in here for."

He shook hands and immediately turned and stumbled out of the room, leaving Martin to follow.

The study was much larger than the four-square drawing-room, and three walls of it, excluding only the chimney-breast and the doorway, were lined with bookcases. The fourth wall was nearly filled by a square bay window with a door as its centre light up to the transome, a window that looked on to a decently wide strip of garden, enclosed as in front by park paling. This garden also looked bleak and uncared for, but the study had an air of life and human interest. With one exception—an American organ that obliterated half a dozen book-shelves—the furniture was all in keeping, the big light wood pedestal writing table in the centre, the swing chair in front of it, the revolving bookcase, even the two large armchairs that were placed near the newly-lighted fire, all maintained a tone of leisurely work, of somewhat luxurious study. And the books, row above row, that gave colour and setting to the whole, wore a friendly and attractive face. These were no stiff sets of volumes in tooled bindings, no formal collection of an unread, wealthy man; but the accumulations of one who had bought a few books at a time throughout his life. The irregularity of height and binding—some of the books were noticeably shabby

—made some special, living appeal. These were all books that had been read.

Greg had already thrown himself wearily into a big, deep-seated wicker armchair. "Quite a library, eh?" he said, noticing Martin's interest in the books. "Bought every one of them myself, except a few review books I kept. Sit ye down; Hester'll be bringin' us tea in a minute."

"Mr Waterhouse told me . . ." began Martin.

"Oh! I know all about what Wotterhoose told ye," interrupted Greg. "I had your letter. Sit ye doon now and we'll hae a crack." He smiled as if to give point to his lapse into dialect. In his ordinary conversation, only the value he gave to the aspirate in such words as "when" and "which," and an occasional un-English pronunciation, marked him as a Scotchman.

"You're looking out for a secretary, I believe?" said Martin, carefully avoiding further reference to Waterhouse.

"I've been thinkin' of it. Ye see I've got an order from a publisher to write a book on Socialism—I'll show ye the contract presently—and to tell ye the truth the manuscript ought to be delivered next week and I've hardly written a word of it!" Greg paused, and gave a curious little hooting laugh. "I'm so devilish full of work in the city," he went on, "that I can't set myself to write in the evening. I've read about forty books and marked them"—he pointed past Martin to a row of volumes from the tops of which sprouted a sheaf of paper slips—"and I have the whole plan of the book in my mind; what I want now is someone who'll take it up and put the thing into English. If ye could do the job, ye'd have to work with me at night and on Sundays. In fact, it'd be better if ye could live in the house. I'm a widower, ye see, but my sister-in-law is comin' in a week or two to look after the place and ye could very well come then, if it suited your plans. I've a wee bairnie, she'll be in presently

for her tea . . .” He seemed to remember that he had ordered tea some few minutes before and rang the electric bell impatiently, first pressing the button steadily and then giving it a series of vicious jabs.

“ I can do nothin’ with these wummin,” he explained, smiling again at Martin, “ bletherin’ about the place!” And as his urgent summons still evoked no response, he went at the bell again with a renewed spirt of temper.

Martin, feeble observer as he was, was struck by the change of character in Greg’s face during this momentary display of irascibility. In speaking he showed a frank geniality, he seemed eager to put his affairs plainly before Martin, so eager, indeed, that Martin had had no opportunity as yet of asking a question or making any comment save a short interpolated “ Yes ” or “ I see ” to mark his comprehension. But when Greg turned to the bell, the humour and friendliness died out of his grey eyes, and his well-cut but rather large, loose mouth grew ugly, almost bestial. The change in some way intimidated Martin; he felt uneasy as if he were witnessing a disgraceful thing.

The second summons, however, produced the desired effect. The door opened and a young, neatly dressed woman with black hair and eyes and a high complexion, came in bearing a tea-tray, which she set down on the writing table while she opened and placed a small folding table that stood against the book-shelves.

“ Whur’s Miss Biddy?” asked Greg roughly.

“ She’s been naughty,” replied the young woman.

“ I tolt her she would not get down to her tea.”

“ Ach!” ejaculated Greg, giving a more than German roughness to the guttural. He jumped out of his chair and hurried from the room. Martin heard him going upstairs three steps at a stride.

The maid—she wore neither cap nor apron—proceeded calmly to set the tea-tray. She gave no sign that she was in any way perturbed.

Within a minute Greg returned, carrying a little girl

of about three years old. She oddly resembled her father. Her baby lips exaggerated the marked curves of the man's mouth, but they were the same curves, and it was not difficult to trace the sag of Greg's underlip as a development from the faint pout of the child. Her grey eyes, too, stared frankly, almost rudely, at Martin, but like her father, she seemed deliberately in so doing to reserve any sight of her own mind. Their very stare had a quality of furtiveness, as if they looked through a peep-hole which hid the face. The child's hair was short, hardly reaching her shoulders, and its present fairness promised in time to tone down to the indeterminate tint of Greg's—much the colour of matured hay.

Greg sat down again in the armchair with the little girl on his knee, but almost immediately she began to wriggle, slipped down, and after a moment's hesitation came over to Martin.

"Who are *you*?" she asked, quite clearly.

"Come here, Biddie," put in Greg, leaning forward in his chair. "That's Mr Bond who's goin' to write dad-da's book."

"Sha'n't come," said the child. She stuck her thumb in her mouth and her expression grew sullen. She stood swaying her body from the waist with a little wriggle of impatience.

"Biddie!" said Greg with a note of warning in his voice, and at that the child suddenly slipped to the floor and crawled under Martin's chair.

"Biddie! Come oot o' that!" Greg's tone was angry now. Martin got up and stood aside; he was embarrassed and very uncomfortable; he feared that there was going to be some sort of a scene which could only be unpleasant.

His fears were justified, for Greg went down on his knees, and tried to pull the child from under the chair. "*Bid-dee! Bid-dee!* Come out, now," he repeated; but the child, who had wound her fat little arms

round one of the legs of the chair, silently refused to budge.

Then Greg gave up the attempt, rose to his feet and lifted the armchair bodily. Instantly the child relaxed her hold of the leg, and scuttling for the writing table before her father could set down the chair, crawled between the pedestals.

"Shall—shall I stop her?" asked Martin nervously.

Greg did not answer him, but plunged down after Biddie, bumping against and nearly upsetting the tea-table.

This time he was more successful, for the child had nothing to cling to, and was pulled out a little roughly by her father.

So far she had been curiously quiet, but when she was caught she began to scream loudly and to beat at her father's face with little scratching hands.

Greg was smiling somewhat grimly. Holding the child away from his face, he carried her quickly out of the room. Martin heard her fierce screams ascending two flights of stairs.

4

"She has fits of this kind of thing," explained Greg quietly when he returned. "Here, help yourself to tea; it'll be gettin' cold." He poured out a cup of tea for himself, spilling both tea and milk into the saucer and over the tray. He drank a mouthful greedily, dropping his mouth to the cup and sucking the tea noisily, took two bites out of a piece of toast and then produced a large tin of cigarettes from the pocket of his jacket and began to smoke. The treatment of his cigarettes resembled the treatment of his tea. When he had smoked a cigarette half way down, he threw it impatiently into the fire with a kind of disgust.

During these interruptions Martin's mind had been

consciously working on the problem of the offer which had been tentatively put before him. He had a small private income amounting to about £120 a year, and the fact that no question of salary had yet been raised did not prejudice him. As to the man with whom he was to work, Martin had come to no decision. In his youthful way he found large consolation in the word "eccentric," and the eulogies of Waterhouse had created a subconscious impression which was now precipitated by these evidences of unconventionality. Again, the sight of the books and the prospect of studying so essential a problem as "Socialism" had favourably influenced him. He had application and ambition, and was clever enough, even at twenty-three, to realize some of his own deficiencies of knowledge. These things he had been weighing for the past ten minutes, considering them in connexion with the probability that he would have leisure and opportunity to pursue his journalism while he lived in the house. One further question intrigued him, although he saw no possibility of solving it that day. Mention had been made of a dead wife and a sister-in-law, and he had instantly connected them with the two photographs in the other room. But which of them had died? With a sudden sense of fate, he decided that it must be the elder, the beautiful, sad woman upon whom the shadow had already fallen. He made that decision as an offering to placate the gods.

He looked with a new interest at the clumsily modelled features of the man opposite. A certain coarseness in the blurred outlines of the clean shaven face, faintly disgusted him. He shrank from the thought of associating Greg with the woman of the photograph. The child Biddie was so like her father that her features provided no evidence. Yet, fatalistically, Martin again laid the sacrifice of his hope at the gods' feet, laid it with a shudder of resignation. . . .

As soon as he had begun to smoke, Greg had thrown himself back once more into the depths of his long

wicker armchair. But while his body remained fairly quiet, save for the restless movements of his long thin hand as he rapidly puffed and threw away his cigarettes, there was no repose in the aspect of the man. He sighed and looked about him, he seemed eager to be at something that he could not reach.

Martin took these signs as a mark that the interview was at an end.

"To come back to the matter in hand," he said; "I shouldn't have any objection to living here. I suppose it would only be for a month or two? Really, of course, I want to get a Parliamentary secretaryship

..."
"Oh! I can get that for ye," interrupted Greg. "But ye'd have to work with me for a month or two first, ye understand. However, I'll write to ye about it. Ye see, I can't have ye here till Maggie, that's my sister-in-law, comes. These wummin here drive me crazy. They're Hieland, the two of them; a bletherin' couple of wenches."

Martin got to his feet. "Well, you have my address," he said. He knew the worst now. It was impossible that that woman could be called "Maggie." But the name fitted to perfection the picture of her younger sister.

Greg looked at him with a strange touch of eagerness.

"Ach! you needn't be goin' yet," he said. "If ye'll just excuse me a moment, I have something to attend to . . ." He was out of the room before he had completed his sentence. He shut the door carefully behind him. Martin heard him cross the hall to a room opposite to that in which he had waited. Then that door, also, was noisily closed.

Martin interested himself in looking round at the books.

5

In less than five minutes, however, Greg was back again. His manner was changed. He was now full of high spirits and a rather coarse jocularly. He began to talk volubly about the books, reciting the history of their purchase, and more particularly, and at great length, the story of his acquisition of certain early numbers of the *Edinburgh Review*. He punctuated many of his remarks with his strange hooting laugh, that had, in some way, the quality of a sneer.

"I really ought to be going," Martin got in at last; "I've an appointment . . ."

"Hoo! Let it wait, man," returned Greg. "They'll think all the better of ye for keepin' 'em waitin'. Come on, sit ye down, now. We haven't talked out this business of ours. Sit ye down."

"Really, I ought . . ." protested Martin, but he was overborne. The personality of Greg suddenly overpowered him. He felt that in any clash of wills he would have no chance against the steady insistence of this man. Greg was dominating, resistless, he pushed all Martin's polite excuses on one side as if they were of no account whatever.

But when Martin had given way and had sat down again in the armchair, Greg made no further reference to the matter of the secretaryship. Instead, he became sentimentally autobiographical. "I'm a widower, man," he said thoughtfully, and looked at Martin for sympathy.

"Yes! you told me! I'm awfully sorry," stammered Martin. "Have you . . . Was it some time ago?"

"A year last September," replied Greg, dropping his head and staring into the fire. "It's not the same house since she went. We came here when we were first married four years ago this October and I've been alone, now, except just for Biddie, for over twelve months."

Martin could find no comment and looked as sympathetic as he was able.

"I just live for Biddie now," went on Greg. "She's not vairy like her mother, it'll be my side of the family she favours. Puir Elsie had not a strong pairsonality, but she was a wunnerfu' sweet wife to me."

An inspiration came to Martin. "Er—was that her photograph I saw on the mantelpiece in the other room?" he asked.

"Aye! I could not bear to hae it in here," returned Greg.

"The younger one?" persisted Martin.

"Aye, the other's Maggie, her sister. Whiles she'll be comin' to look after the house. Maggie'll be a good enough wench too, but she's no like ma puir Elsie." Greg relapsed into a melancholy, staring silence.

Martin was conscious of a sense of release. He got to his feet. "I must be going, sir," he said. "And if you can anyway make it convenient to have me here I shall be glad to come."

"I'll let ye know," replied Greg. He roused himself and stood up, putting a hand on Martin's arm. "I'll write and let ye know," he repeated. The room was nearly dark and he moved over to the door and switched on the electric light. "Ye see, I cannot have ye here till my sister-in-law comes," he explained again, as he followed Martin to the front door.

The air outside seemed cool and fresh after the atmosphere of the study. The room had had a peculiar smell which Martin could not exactly place; Greg himself had exhaled a slight odour of cachous, but that did not in any way account for the faintly sour smell of the study.

As he walked out into the wind and freshness of the early night, he heaved a sigh of relief.

"So it *was*," he reflected. "What an influence, what an inspiration she would be in the house! How she would purify the whole place by her mere presence!"

The gate in front of him banged mournfully as he approached it. When he had reached the pavement, Martin turned, and leaning over, carefully pressed down the latch into the hasp.

II. THE OUTSET.

I

MARTIN waited for ten days and then wrote to Robin Greg to ask if he was yet in a position to decide the question of the secretaryship. To this letter he received no reply and after a week had elapsed he wrote again, saying that he had had another offer made to him and would be glad to hear from Mr Greg before he definitely accepted it. At the end of three weeks Martin called on Waterhouse at his office.

Waterhouse received him with a cordiality that was almost flattering.

"I came to ask you about Mr Greg," began Martin.

"You saw him, didn't you?" said Waterhouse, encouragingly.

"Yes, I did, and I thought it was practically arranged," said Martin, "But that's three weeks ago and I've written twice since and had no answer."

"I believe he's been away," returned Waterhouse reassuringly. "He didn't attend the 'Revival Club' committee last Tuesday, and Spiers told me he thought he was away."

"Oh, I see," said Martin, and then went on, "I don't quite know what to do about it. I've had an offer of a place in the news-room on the *Daily Post*. It isn't much of a job, but it would be experience for me, and Mr Maxwell was rather decent about keeping it open for a few days. I've done a little reviewing for him, you know."

"Yes!" replied Waterhouse thoughtfully. He looked down at a manuscript on the desk before him, and ran his thin delicate fingers through the masses of his exuberant black beard. "Yes, of course, it would be

experience. But I don't think that sort of post leads to much."

"I should think Mr Maxwell was rather a good sort?" suggested Martin.

"Yes, oh yes, certainly," replied Waterhouse without warmth. "Of course you know," he added, looking up and meeting Martin's glance with a sort of wistful frankness, "you know that Maxwell and I had a difference of opinion in '99."

"Oh? No, I didn't," stammered Martin. "About the war, do you mean? I was only sixteen then, you see. I didn't . . ."

"No, you wouldn't be taking any interest in politics then," put in Waterhouse quickly. "I don't mean to say that Maxwell and I are not on perfectly good terms now. We are—perfectly good. I merely mean that if you go on to the *Daily Post*, it might make it a little difficult for me to . . ."

His white thin fingers were at his beard again; his sad eyes looked inquiringly at Martin. It was generally known that Waterhouse was weak in the chest—the fact always seemed to account for that touch of wistfulness in him—but his friends hoped to get him through. He was over thirty-five, now, and better than he had ever been before. It was, at least, a hopeful case.

"I see," said Martin again. He felt that he had been rather clumsy and was anxious to make amends. "You really think, then, that there is still a chance of my getting the secretaryship, and that it might lead to more than the other thing?"

"I could keep in touch with you better," returned Waterhouse, dropping his eyelashes—he was amazingly hairy. "I am hoping that you will belong to our party, you know. I don't mean to say that we are in any way opposed to the Government programme, quite the contrary! but we represent a section that is, perhaps, rather more radical, in some respects. We hope . . ." he mumbled something inaudible. His voice was always

pitched on a soft, low note that did not carry. If he had not been such a hopeless public speaker he would never have been editor of *The Gallery*.

"I suppose Mr Greg . . ." began Martin.

"Without question," replied Waterhouse quickly. "Without question. He would have been put up at the last general election if it hadn't been for his wife's death. I'm afraid that broke him down rather, for a time. I suppose you noticed . . .?"

"I thought he was a little odd," admitted Martin. "A little eccentric, perhaps."

"Yes?" prompted Waterhouse, turning over the leaves of a manuscript. "Odd, you thought?"

"Rather brusque in his manner and—and funny somehow," explained Martin.

"I certainly think it would be a chance for you to go to him," said Waterhouse suddenly. "I daresay I shall be seeing him as soon as he comes back. If I do, I'll ask him what he intends doing."

"Oh, thanks very much. It's awfully good of you," said Martin jumping up. "I'm afraid I've been wasting your time, rather." He was afraid, also, that he had slightly offended Waterhouse by that description of Greg as "funny somehow."

But Waterhouse's good-bye was cordial enough. He even held out a hope that he might find work for Martin on *The Gallery*, a little later on.

Martin wrote to Maxwell that night, and refused the offer of a sub-editorship on the *Daily Post*. It was a very polite letter, but he carried it about in his pocket for three hours before he posted it. He had a strange disinclination to commit himself to a final decision.

Five days after he had seen Waterhouse, Martin received a letter from Robin Greg. It was typewritten on

a large quarto sheet with a copperplate heading which bore the name of Bickersteth, Andrew and Greg, and an address in Eastcheap, but no indication as to the nature of the firm's activities.

The note itself consisted of three lines and ran:

"Dear Mr Bond, I have been expecting to hear from you. If convenient to you, I should be glad to start the book on Saturday next. Yours truly, Robin Greg." The signature was written across the foot sloping upwards at an angle of thirty degrees or thereabouts.

"Well, that's rum," Martin remarked to himself. "I wonder if he never got my letters, or what?" He was afraid that Greg was offended: his letter was certainly curt. There was, however, the possible solution that he had not been home for three weeks and had gone straight back to his office in Eastcheap. If so he would find the letters awaiting him on his return to Garroch, and the apparent rudeness or indifference of Martin's silence would be explained.

To make everything certain on this occasion, Martin sent a telegram accepting the appointment, to each of Greg's addresses.

He hoped that sometime during the three days that would intervene before Saturday, he might receive some acknowledgment of the receipt of his letters, or at least, some further confirmation of the agreement—not a word had been said, as yet, as to salary. But as he had heard no more by two o'clock on Saturday, he decided to take everything for granted.

He drove down in a motor cab. He took only one portmanteau with him, and made arrangements for the rest of his luggage to be kept at his boarding-house until he returned.

The driver of the taxi had never heard of Demetrius Road, and when he was told the suburb in which it was situated, stipulated for special fare on the ground that it was outside the radius. Martin conceded the demand with a haughty indifference.

He was strung up and nervous. At the last moment he was inclined to send another telegram and cancel the whole affair.

Even in the cab he still hesitated.

It had been a dull morning, and at the very moment of starting the rain began, at first in a thin, hazy drizzle, but soon developing into a steady downpour. A mile from the boarding-house, the driver of the cab stopped to put on his waterproof.

Never in his life before had Martin felt so nervous and uneasy. The rain depressed him, and still more the sight of the dreary streets through which he was passing. Everything about him seemed full of gloomy foreboding.

More than once he leaned forward to give the driver fresh directions. Some instinct told him to turn back, but each time he argued fiercely with himself, urging himself not to be a fool. He examined the facts and found no excuse for this curious disinclination to go on.

Demetrius Road was found at last, after many gropings and inquiries.

Martin paid off the cab at the gate, which was latched now, as if no one had passed through it since Martin had so deliberately closed it five weeks before. The curtains still straggled across the lights of the segmental bay, the bell was still out of order, and when he had attracted attention to his presence by using the dingy knocker, Hester precisely repeated her earlier formula before opening the door.

As she, at last, flung it back, the key fell out and tinkled on the tiles of the lobby.

"Och! it's you," said Hester. "Mister Greg'll no be at home, but he tolt me to expect ye. Will I take your bag?"

"Oh! that's all right, thanks," returned Martin. He was longing to ask questions, but had not the courage.

"Will ye go upstairs while I mak' ye some tea?" commanded Hester.

At the door of Martin's bedroom, she turned and said abruptly,

"Miss Hamilton'll be comin' the evening. Mr Greg'll be goin' to meet her, maybe."

But even that news did not disperse Martin's gloom. There was something about the air of the place that was physically repugnant to him. He wished that he was not going to meet Miss Hamilton in that house.

III. THE FIRST STUMBLE.

I

MARTIN'S bedroom was over that square, desolate room into which he had been shown when he first came to Garroch. From his window he looked out over the front garden and the road, and an arc-lamp a few yards down the opposite pavement threw curious broken beams on to the wall above his head. Below the window the flat roof of the segmental bay gleamed wet and grey. There was no stir of life in the road and the air was very still. The soft hiss of the rain, the gurgle of a down-pipe and the patter of water from the leaking eaves-gutter were the only sounds that challenged the prim solemnity of Demetrius Road. London might have lain on the other side of the world.

Martin shivered and turned on the electric light. He found that the time was a quarter-past four; the day had died early on that dull afternoon.

Martin still retained all his youthful precisions in the matter of dress, and on this occasion he was more than usually careful. He changed the tweeds and brogues he had been wearing for blue serge and patent leather shoes, hesitating for a moment over his choice of socks before deciding on black silk. He looked for hot water outside his door but found none, and made a mighty splashing in cold before he was content with a feeling of perfect cleanness.

He found a bright fire in the study and his tea laid out on the little folding table. The curtains were drawn over the long window, and the room wore an air of cheerful comfort. By the time he had finished tea and lighted a cigarette, Martin had decided that it wasn't going to be so bad after all. After a somewhat

protracted examination of the books, he took down Kirkup's *Quintessence of Socialism* and began to read, by way of preparation for his coming work.

The house was wonderfully quiet. Once he heard a distant commotion upstairs, attributable, probably, to Biddie in her bath; and now and again he heard the voices of Hester and the other maid, but for the most part almost perfect silence prevailed. There was not even a clock in the room.

The first interruption to his reading came at a quarter to seven, when Hester came in to clear away the tea-things.

"I'll be gettin' you a bit supper," she remarked when she had put the little table back against the bookcase.

"Oh!" said Martin, suddenly awakened to the realities of life. "When do you expect Mr Greg back, then?"

"He'll be gone to meet Miss Hamilton," said Hester, regarding Martin with a quiet approval of which he was quite unconscious. "They'll not be in till ten, I shouldn't wonder."

"But, I say, don't you bother to cook anything specially for me," replied Martin. "I shall be all right, you know. I can quite well wait till Mr Greg comes in."

"She'll not be botherin'," returned Hester enigmatically, and went out leaving Martin quite in the dark as to her intention.

At a quarter to eight she returned to tell him that his supper was ready. He had heard a thud of footsteps backwards and forwards in the hall for some time past, and had guessed that she was persisting in her resolution, but he had waited for conclusive evidence.

"Oh! I say, it's awfully good of you," he said. "I'll just run upstairs and wash."

"Och!" ejaculated Hester, and her face crinkled into a half satirical smile. As she watched him run lightly upstairs she raised her hands in an odd gesture of wonder and approval.

The room in which Martin ate the chop Hester had cooked for him, faced the drawing-room across the hall; a little negligible room too small for the heavy light-oak sideboard that was the only noticeable article of furniture it contained.

When he had finished Martin got up quietly and went into the drawing-room. He turned on the light and stood for several minutes gazing at the photograph of Miss Hamilton. Her face appeared less sad than he had imagined and he found a tenderness in the eyes and mouth, that had been no part of the memory he had carried with him during these five weeks. He suffered a faint sense of disappointment at the discovery. As he saw it now, this was the photograph of a living woman; in some inexplicable way he had been cherishing the ideal of something more ethereal, more angelic. That deliberate association of the photograph with his thought of the dead wife, had doubtless been a subconscious influence.

When he returned to the study, the problem of Socialism no longer held his interest. Shutting his eyes, he leaned back in his chair, and quite distinctly the face of the photograph presented itself to him, but as he tried to hold it, it slid up and away. In the effort to retain the vision he opened his eyes and it vanished completely. He tried several times to repeat the phenomenon, without success . . .

He was yawning horribly when he heard the click of a latch-key in the front door.

2

He stood up at once. He was nervous and uncomfortable. The whole affair had been so informal; and he thought it quite possible that Greg might have forgotten all about him. He could not decide whether to go out into the hall or wait in the study. He heard Greg calling

loudly for Hester, and the thump of luggage being set down. He waited another minute, standing uneasily by the writing table, and then, as no one came in, he opened the door and went into the hall.

There was no one to be seen. The front door stood wide open; and two rather small trunks had been set down at the foot of the stairs.

He was seized with a sudden fit of impatience. He frowned and muttered the conventional expletive of his class. He was conscious of a strong feeling of annoyance with Greg for putting him in an awkward position. "Oh, damn the man," he repeated. "Why can't he behave in an ordinary decent way?"

Then the door of the dining-room opened quickly and Greg came out.

"Hello!" he said brusquely at sight of Martin.

"Hallo!" replied Martin flushing, and then to clear the situation he went on—"I've been here since four. I understood from your letter . . ."

"Oh! all right, all right, man," said Greg, "that can wait. I'm starved."

He still had on his bowler hat, and his coat collar was turned up to his ears. He looked wet, cold and cross.

"I suppose ye've got a fire in the study," he continued, "Maggie's dropped something in the cab, like a feckless creature, and gone out to hunt for it."

"The feckless creature has found it, Robin," said a voice from the doorway.

Martin started and blushed again. He felt as if he had been caught listening to and agreeing with an altogether horrible estimate of the woman who was standing there in the lobby.

She was smiling nervously, her head bent a little forward. She was wearing a long, straight coat of rough cloth, and had a brown fur stole twisted twice round her neck. On her head was a little round cap made of the same fur. Both stole and cap were damp and dragged, and she herself looked wet, cold and rather piteous.

"Och! for Heaven's sake come in, Maggie, and shut the door," said Greg. "I'm clemmed."

She obeyed him with a kind of nervous eagerness, and then came forward into the hall.

"Robin," she said, "you haven't introduced me."

"Och!" exclaimed Greg. "What's all the fash about! This is Mr Bond, and ye're just Maggie, I suppose. Come into the study, woman, and let's get warm."

Martin followed them, feeling utterly ashamed and miserable.

Greg put his bowler hat on the writing table and threw himself into his usual chair. Miss Hamilton sat down opposite to him and unwound the damp fur from her neck. When she had taken off the stole, she hung it over the arm of her chair and unbuttoned her long coat. Under it she was wearing a brown tweed skirt and a little tweed jacket with side pockets. She had already taken off her gloves when she came in, and she now laid them down to dry on the curb.

Martin took the swing chair and leaned forward over the writing table which was between him and the other two. He was utterly disappointed in Miss Hamilton at that moment. He could trace a certain likeness between her and the woman of the photograph, but the differences were inexpressible.

3

For quite a couple of minutes there was silence except for the grunting of Greg as he stretched out his boots to the fire, then he turned to Martin and said,

"I found your letters."

"I hoped you would," returned Martin dryly. He was quite determined that he would give up this engagement. In his own words "it wasn't nearly good enough."

"Ye see, I've been away," said Greg, "and when I

got back there was a devil of a lot to be done, and I'd no time to be botherin' about private correspondence."

Martin nodded. "I see," he said coldly.

"And I haven't had a minute to write to ye again since I got your wire," Greg went on. "But I 'phoned to Macaulays' and got 'em to alter the date of the contract for the delivery of the book. They've given us till the end of March. That's nearly five months. We ought to get it finished by then."

"Oh! yes, I should think so," said Martin. "Of course I haven't the least idea how much there is to do." He thought that to-morrow would be time enough to explain his change of plans.

"Oh! we'll go into that in the morning," said Greg. "As a matter of fact the book isn't started yet, but I told Macaulay over the 'phone that it was half finished." He emphasized the remark by his hooting laugh. Martin was plainly left to draw the inference that Macaulay had been cunningly deceived.

"Here, I must go and get my coat off," Greg went on. "I'll be back in a minute."

He went out of the room, closing the door after him, and Martin heard him go upstairs, and then the sound of his footsteps moving across the floor overhead.

Miss Hamilton was leaning forward, stretching out her hands to the fire. She had taken off her wet little fur cap, and balanced it with her stole on the arm of her chair. As Greg left the room she turned her head towards Martin and pushed up the damp but still waving hair from her forehead.

"I hope Hester's been looking after you," she said.

"Oh! yes, rather," returned Martin. "Splendidly. She gave me tea and dinner and all sorts of luxuries. To tell you the truth, I was nearly asleep when you arrived. I'm afraid you must have had an awful journey."

"No, I didn't. I rather enjoyed the journey," said Miss Hamilton. She had a curious little hesitation in her

speech, every now and again; a tiny pause at the beginning of a sentence. She hesitated now, framing a ghost of the labial with her lips before she continued. "But Robin insisted on my having something to eat at King's Cross before we came on. I didn't want it in the least, but he would take me to a restaurant in the Euston Road. That was when we got so wet."

She spoke rather rapidly and she had raised her voice, but she was paying no attention either to Martin or to her own words. Her face was turned partly away from him and she had the look of one who was listening intently.

Quite suddenly Martin realized that she was exactly like the photograph in the next room, like the vision as he had first seen and remembered it. He saw all the sadness and the ethereal beauty without any touch of that more human tenderness which he had discovered when he had revisited the room that evening.

Upstairs the sound of footsteps had ceased, but in the silence which had succeeded there came to them in the room below the sound of a soft report, as if someone had dropped a smooth stone into a pool of water.

Miss Hamilton jumped to her feet. "Oh! and I haven't been to look at Biddie yet," she said. "I must just take a peep at her. Perhaps I'd better say 'good night,' Mr Bond. I'm rather tired and I don't think I'll be coming down again." She gathered up her stole and toque and pushed back the arm-chair.

Martin got up and opened the door for her. She gave him a shy smile and a little inclination of the head as she passed him.

Martin shut the door and returned to his seat by the table. In a moment all his idealism of Miss Hamilton had returned, and with it a horror of the man in whose house he was. His immediate impulse was to throw

up his job and get away. Greg seemed to him coarse and vulgar, his manners and his speech failed all too obviously to attain to that code of "decency" which was the foundation of Martin's standard of behaviour. The man was Scotch and a graduate of Edinburgh University, and these were faults which, in Martin's opinion, should have been covered by a more than ordinary attention to the *convenances* of decent society.

"I don't believe I could stand him for a week," thought Martin, and his analysis of his own emotions went no deeper than that. He was hardly conscious of a vague fear that had its origin in something more profound than his dislike of Robin Greg . . .

The footsteps overhead had begun again, and were followed by the banging of a door. Then came the sound of Greg's voice calling roughly, "Are ye gone to your bed, Maggie?" and after a short pause the same voice saying, "Oh! well, good night. I'm just going down to have a talk with Bond."

"I'm damned if you are," muttered Martin.

He got up quickly, turned out the light and went into the hall. He met Greg blundering down the stairs.

"Whisht! ye're not going to your bed yet," said Greg. "It's not much after ten."

"I think I will, if you don't mind," said Martin firmly. "I'm infernally sleepy, and I expect you're pretty tired."

"Ye're not going to bed yet," returned Greg. "I want to talk to ye. Come along in, man."

His voice had a note of command, but it was not that which influenced Martin. With his newly confirmed resolution to throw up his secretaryship on the next day, Martin had little respect for any attempt at enforcing the relations of employer and employed. But again the personality of Greg had declared itself. He seemed to have concentrated all his attention for the moment on this one effort, and he made it clear by his attitude that he would be restrained by none of the

ordinary rules of politeness in the attempt to win his point. His face, seen under the light of the hall-lamp as he stood on the stairs gripping the handrail and blocking Martin's passage, wore an expression of saturnine determination and satisfaction; he showed clearly enough not only the will to have his own way, but, also, the foreknowledge that he would be successful. And he gloated, with a half satirical sneer, over the sight of Martin's defeat.

"Come away in, now," he repeated, rather grimly.

Martin felt as if he were confronted by an immense wall; he felt that nothing he could say or do would move this man an inch from his purpose. And with that feeling came another; a grudging respect, a realization of some sort of superiority of will or influence in the man, whom, socially, he so despised.

"Oh! very well," said Martin in sulky submission. He turned back and re-entered the study.

Greg, following him, paused in the doorway.

"I'm clemmed with the cold," he said. "Perhaps I'd do well to have a drop of hot toddy." He paused, looking keenly and inquiringly at Martin. "Will ye join me?" he asked.

"I don't think so, thanks," replied Martin. He thought the offer had been made too grudgingly. Scotchmen were notoriously mean.

"Ye don't think so, eh?" asked Greg. "Well, I'll have in two glasses and ye can make up your mind presently." He came over to the fireplace and rang the bell.

Hester presented herself without delay. "Did ye ring?" she asked.

"I've got a chill, Hester," explained her master, almost apologetically. "Will ye just bring in the little kettle, and tumblers and sugar and the whisky. I think there'll be some in the decanter on the sideboard."

Hester retired without comment, and returned a minute or two later with everything she had been asked

to fetch. She put down the tray on the table and set the kettle on the fire without a word, but as she was leaving the room she looked at Greg and said "Miss Margaret'll be gone to her bed, no doubt," and without waiting for a reply went out and shut the door.

5

Greg lay back in his arm-chair and stretched out his feet to the fire—he had changed his boots for old carpet slippers. So long and low was the chair that his body from feet to neck was in a straight line. Four fingers of each hand were thrust into flap pockets cut in the front of his trousers. His chin was dropped on to his chest; he stared solemnly, thoughtfully before him.

Martin waited for him to speak. He had been snubbed so often when he had made any reference to the work he had been engaged to do, that he fought shy of that topic, and for the moment could think of no other.

"The general scheme of the book is all cut and dried," remarked Greg at last. "Anyway I have it quite clear in my mind. The first two chapters'll deal with the history of Socialism. I've made some notes that I want ye to look over, and ye'd better read up the subject for yourself, so that ye can put those chapters into shape. I daresay ye can make three chapters. It's an interestin' subject. The second part will all be the Economic theory, and I expect I'll have to do most of that myself, but ye'll be able to look it over and straighten it out. I know well enough what I have to say, but my literary style is too oratorical. It's well enough for some subjects, but a little too florid maybe for economic theory. Ye'll have to keep an eye on that."

He was going on but the kettle suddenly boiled over and he got up to attend it; making, Martin thought, an unnecessary fuss about the heat of the handle.

"Shall I do it?" Martin asked, but Greg refused any assistance.

"Sit ye down, sit ye down, man," he said. "I'll do it."

He did not ask Martin again whether he would take any whisky, but poured out a generous allowance and filled it up with hot water.

"Here, ye can put your own sugar in," he said, and turned his back while he filled the other glass.

Martin did not see whether Greg had filled his own glass or not, but he saw him drink and when Greg turned round, the glass was half empty.

His own whisky was so hot that he could not touch it. "Lord, what a throat he must have," he thought.

"It'll keep out the chill," remarked Greg, subsiding into his chair again. "There's nothin' like hot grog for a chill."

He began to talk about the book again with more enthusiasm than he had shown before, telling Martin the history of his contract with Macaulays, and how pressure of work had interfered with his writing.

From this topic he slid gradually into a discussion of more general politics. It seemed that he had met every man of note on both sides of the House. He told personal anecdotes in relation to them; and then, standing on the hearthrug he gave some remarkable imitations of their platform manner, their pose of the hands and tricks of gesticulation.

Martin forgot his resentment, and his critical attitude towards certain failings in common politeness. In this genial mood Greg was wonderfully entertaining. Moreover his very solecisms wore a new aspect. Some of these anecdotes revealed him as a man who spoke his mind openly without regard to the position or opinions of the person addressed. His vagaries were no longer presented as eccentricity, but as the characteristic of one who had little respect for other men's judgments, who was strong in the belief in his own power. All that apparent rudeness was probably no more than a certain Scotch roughness of manner. And had not his belief in

himself been justified? He could not be more than thirty-two or three years old; yet he was being eagerly sought after by the party who rallied round Waterhouse and *The Gallery*, the party which, even at Cambridge, Martin had heard spoken of as representing the true spirit of the new Liberal movement.

Robin Greg suddenly appeared as a new figure in the political field, a man who was known and watched by those who pulled the important strings. A seat would be found for him, and if the Liberals could settle that essential question of the Lords' veto and remain in power, no doubt Greg would not be long in reaching Cabinet rank.

Martin felt that he had shown his youth and ignorance by passing premature judgment on a man who was so closely in touch with the rulers of the country. The Cambridge influence had been too strong; it was necessary to realize that the figures in the larger world were not so bound by petty conventions and social usages, as those who paced serenely among the cloisters of academic thought. One day Martin Bond might be proud to say that he had acted as secretary to a great Premier . . .

"Och! the kettle's empty," remarked Greg. "I'll just go out and fill it."

"Isn't it getting rather late?" asked Martin.

"Oh! we'll make a night of it, now," returned Greg, as he left the room . . .

Martin got to bed at last, a little muddled but full of great ambitions. There was a great work to be done in England. He had learned that night, for the first time, how many of the great figures in the political world had fallen a prey to the insidious vice of drink. Few, indeed, were those against whom the accusation could not be brought. Liberalism was rotten with it. But with Robin Greg as Prime Minister and Martin Bond as, say, Home Secretary, England would witness a wonderful purification of the political air. This vice of drink would be

rooted up and with it all those evils which were now falsely attributed by some critics to the abuses of the party system.

With a strangely irritating uncertainty in his mind as to whether he had not left his clothes lying on the floor, a question he could neither put away from him nor summon up sufficient purpose to investigate, Martin fell asleep in the midst of a vision of a sober and regenerate Parliament, ruled and led by the two great exponents of the new Temperance movement.

IV. RECOVERY.

I

A DRAGGING, insistent dream that concerned the banging of the front gate, resolved itself into the consciousness that someone was knocking with determination at the bedroom door.

"Hallo! Yes? What is it?" asked Martin, and then, as his consciousness became once more involved in memory, he added in a louder voice, "Oh! All right. Thanks."

He sat up in bed, and the movement made him suck in his breath with a gasp of pain. His brain seemed to have shrunk in the night, and no longer filled his skull. He put his hands to his eyes to hide the brilliance of the dull morning. For a couple of minutes he sat quite still, afraid to move lest that shrunken burning brain of his should jolt against its containing walls. Then he got up slowly, sat for another moment on the edge of the bed, and finally opened the door and felt outside for the expected hot water. He dared not bend his head to look down, for then his brain lurched horribly against his eyeballs.

When he had found the hot water he returned immediately to his seat on the edge of the bed. He felt rather sick, and he was afraid to move—he could not face the physical throes of sickness with that head. Presently he lay down and wound the bedclothes about him. The sickness was passing and the heat of his whole body seemed to have been absorbed by his eyes and brain. He waited for ten minutes before he made another essay.

It was not quite the first headache of this kind he had suffered, but it was undoubtedly the worst. He thought

with longing of cold water and wondered where the bath-room was to be found. He drank a tumblerful of water and soused his head and face in the basin before he ventured to attempt the discovery.

The door of the bath-room was standing open, and its position was further advertised by the intermittent throaty groans of the waste-pipe as it discharged the last bathful of water.

Martin wondered vaguely whether Greg had preceded him.

Shaving and dressing occupied more time than usual, but he found no one in the dining-room when he got down. He was quite prepared to wait. He wanted tea, but he had no desire for food. The feeling of sickness was gone, but his head and eyes ached consumingly.

He sat with his back to the feeble light of the November morning and hoped fervently that Miss Hamilton was having her breakfast in bed. He was afraid to meet her; he was utterly ashamed of himself and angry with Greg. The two feelings appeared part of the same emotion.

He was relieved by the entrance of Hester, who brought in a single breakfast and told him that Miss Hamilton had already had hers, and that the master of the house had a chill and would not be down before lunch. She added that she had lighted a fire in the study.

Martin drank all the tea and nibbled a little toast, but he could not look at the bacon and eggs. He looked round desperately to find a hiding place for them, had a wild inspiration to take them out and bury them in the garden, and finally left them undisturbed on the table. He rang the bell before he went out of the room, in the hope that Hester would clear the table before Miss Hamilton could see the evidences of his shame. He did not mind the loss of Hester's opinion; indeed he thought it probable that she already regarded him with contempt. She had looked at him curiously when she

had brought in the breakfast, and he had thought that her look expressed scorn of his weakness.

The morning passed tediously. The smell of the study disgusted him when he first entered, and he threw open the door into the back garden, and stood for some time looking out at the ragged lawn and the weedy flower beds which enclosed it. When he returned into the study to warm his hands, the faintly sour, heady smell seemed to have been dissipated. Nevertheless he left the garden door wide open.

No one came in to disturb him. Once he heard unaccountable sounds overhead that reminded him of the choking groans of the bath-waste; and about eleven o'clock he heard the voices of Biddy and Miss Hamilton in the hall, followed by the opening and closing of the front door.

After that he settled down with a sense of relief to finish Kirkup's *Quintessence*.

At twelve o'clock he went out and found Hester, who told him that Mr Greg was not getting up and that dinner was for half-past one, information which enabled him to carry out his determination to take a good walk.

When he returned, hardly a trace of his headache remained, and he was quite ready for the mid-day dinner.

2

During his walk he had definitely settled upon his line of action during the meal. As a man of the world with three years at Cambridge and fifteen months experience as a London journalist behind him, he saw clearly enough that it would be absurd for him to appear in any way conscious of last night's lapse from sobriety. It was more than possible that Miss Hamilton had no suspicion of his failure, and of Greg himself he had no fear—Greg was in the same boat, even if he still professed to have taken the whisky medicinally. Moreover,

what was there, after all, to be ashamed about? He had never professed to be a teetotaler—he had not broken any vow. As a matter of fact, drink did not tempt him, it affected him too unpleasantly, and last night's excess was more an accident than anything. Every one took rather too much whisky sometimes.

Martin walked into the dining-room with his head up, strong in the consciousness of virtue.

He found Miss Hamilton and Biddie already seated. He bowed neatly to Miss Hamilton and smiled patronisingly at Biddie, who stared for a moment and then contemptuously turned away her face.

"I'm afraid I'm rather late," said Martin, tripped at the outset.

"Oh! no," replied Miss Hamilton. She was cutting up Biddie's dinner and had not lifted her eyes since Martin came in.

"I hope Mr Greg's chill isn't serious," he said, trying for an opening.

"Oh! no, I don't think so," said Miss Hamilton. "He's rather subject to them."

"I say, can't I do that for you?" was Martin's next attempt, a reference to the carving of the beef, but again he was repulsed, this time by a quiet refusal of his assistance.

After that, dinner proceeded in silence.

Martin's thoughts had begun again from the point at which a certain measure of self-respect had returned to him. He mentally repeated his defence and could find no flaw in it. He tried to persuade himself that Miss Hamilton's manner was an effect of nervousness, but could not fit that explanation to their first meeting. She had not been like this when they had had that brief conversation in the study.

He looked across at Biddie, who was peering at him round an electro-plate jardinière that stood in the middle of the table, but the moment he caught her eye she ducked away. He smiled, and partly to show that he

was feeling quite at his ease, tried to seduce her into a game of "peep-bo!" across the table.

Biddie was not altogether unwilling, her chief reason being that she had reached a point at which in ordinary circumstances she must either declare war or finish her potatoes and cabbage. This distraction with the unfamiliar young man opposite seemed to offer a glorious way of escaping either of those dreadful alternatives. She put down her spoon, chuckled faintly, and dodged Martin's endeavour to catch sight of her.

"Biddie, dear, finish your dinner," said Miss Hamilton, gently.

"Have," said Biddie.

"Oh! what's all this?" asked Miss Hamilton, pointing to the hated vegetables.

Biddie wrinkled her little nose. "It's nasty," she said.

"Biddie! To please Aunt Maggie!" was the next protest.

Plainly it was a horrible dilemma. Biddie hesitated and sought to evade it by peeping again at Martin, but his anxiety to propitiate Miss Hamilton far outweighed any other motive, and he kept his eyes on his own plate.

It may have been this rebuff which determined her plan of campaign, for Biddie suddenly decided to declare war. She pursed her mouth, pushed her plate violently away from her, and then stared blank defiance at her aunt.

"Oh! very well," said Miss Hamilton quietly. "There's a jam roly-poly coming, but you can't have any till you've finished your meat."

Biddie stared solemnly at the jardinière, as if she had not heard this awful threat. Her face and attitude expressed an extraordinary determination that reminded Martin of her father's resolution the night before. "By Jove, she'll be a Tartar when she grows up," he thought.

"She's frightfully obstinate, isn't she?" he said, and earned a quick glance of disapproval from Miss Hamilton, and a more marked sign of contempt from Biddie.

Martin pretended to be shocked at that grimace, which suggested that she only restrained herself by a stupendous effort from putting out her tongue. But the chilliness of the atmosphere had become too marked for any affectation of playfulness. It occurred to Martin that he was making an ass of himself; he smothered a sigh and returned to his beef. He had decided once more that he would not go on with the secretaryship. Everything was against it.

The terrible constrained silence remained unbroken until Hester was summoned to clear away the beef. Biddie made no sign, even when her plate was, by her aunt's order left in front of her. She sat still, her eyes down, her underlip projecting in a sullen pout. But when the pudding was brought in, she suddenly slid from her chair and went over to the window.

Martin looked at Miss Hamilton with a smile. He thought the time had come when he might make one more attempt to break the ice. Her reply was a slight shake of the head, which he understood to signify that no notice was to be taken of Biddie.

The child had appeared to be intent on drawing some primitive design on the window glass with a moistened forefinger, but this exchange of signs must have been observed by her. Perhaps she had already forgotten the first provocation; the mere discipline, the compulsion to eat distasteful food had been swamped by the enormous tragedy of being overlooked, thrust out and forgotten by her intimate world. That, coupled with the loss of pudding, was too much for her self-control. It was unbearable. Her underlip went down and down, her eyes closed, and she cried without restraint.

"Oh! Biddie!" exclaimed Miss Hamilton. She made a movement to get up from her chair, but Biddie was too quick for her. She made a little stumbling run at her

aunt and, still sobbing with considerable noise and vigour, buried her face in her lap.

For some time she refused consolation, nursing, petting and kisses could not at once allay the awful injury that had been done to her; those signs of contrition on the part of her who had been so grievously in the wrong must be continued until full reparation was made. Even the wonderful pudding had ceased to charm, though it was accepted at last, when the hateful plate of cold potato and cabbage had been removed to the sideboard.

And through the whole scene Martin was forced to sit silent and apart. He was the outsider, not Biddie. She could enforce her will, she was powerful, able, within the small limits which alone entered her consciousness, to control her destiny. Martin, by contrast, was a miserable failure. Miss Hamilton had been weak, too generous and soft-hearted, but she, too, was a very rock compared with Martin. He was nothing more than a naughty, foolish schoolboy, snubbed and disgraced; a boy who had not the force of personality to assert himself and claim indulgence as that child of three had done.

At the back of all moved that dim, controlling figure in the room upstairs; the man who could enforce his will on every one of them. He had not been beaten by his child's tears. He had commanded his sister-in-law and she had obeyed him with nervous eagerness. He had opposed his will to Martin's and the contest had been ludicrously brief.

Something within him urged Martin to escape while he had time, but he feared that it was already too late. He dreaded Robin Greg's opposition, and he longed to explain his weakness to Miss Hamilton, to be soothed and comforted even as Biddie had been comforted.

The influence of the house in Demetrius Road, with all its powers of disgust and fascination, was slowly, remorselessly closing his every road of escape . . .

3

He was alone again in the afternoon. The garden door of the study still stood wide open, and the air was clean and fresh. He closed the door and opened two of the transome lights in the window before he sat down to devote himself once more to the study of Socialism. He had now that consolation of tobacco which had been denied him in the morning.

For a time he tried to concentrate his thoughts on the necessity for telling Greg that he could not undertake the secretaryship. With a certain recovery of self-respect, Martin believed that he was prepared to face that necessity without hesitation. But his mind continually slipped away to the contemplation of a more difficult problem, the question of how he was to justify himself to Miss Hamilton.

No doubt it would be possible in the course of years. He might become distinguished, write a great book on Socialism or by sheer brilliance assault and carry a Conservative stronghold; but his mood impelled him to consider more instant measures. He had decided that she must "know about last night," perhaps she had learned of his distaste for breakfast, or she might have heard him going to bed. (Had he been noisy? He could not remember.) And, although he thought the punishment was out of all proportion to the crime, he saw that it was possible that she had a particular prejudice in favour of sobriety. (They had both drunk water at dinner, and no offer of any other drink had been made to him.) Granting these premisses, the clear way to reinstatement must be by the means of total abstinence; it might be possible to figure a little heroically in his refusal of alcohol. He might win a pitched battle with the powerful Greg, for instance. Unfortunately, time was necessary for the carrying out of this plan; a week, at least; and he was preparing to leave the next day.

After all, it would only be fair to Greg to give him a week's notice. That seemed a safe compromise.

Why he was so anxious to win back Miss Hamilton's esteem he did not very closely inquire. She had beautiful hair and eyes, and sometimes she looked like an angel, reasons, enough, perhaps why he should not wish her to regard him as beyond the pale of decent society. But deep in his consciousness was a feeling that she was set apart from ordinary humanity, a remote, unapproachable creature and quite unlike any other woman he had ever known. He could not think of her as belonging to the same order of creation as that woman whose temporary affection he had won, or as that pretty girl in the shop at Cambridge about whom he and several other men of his year had once raved. His mother had died when he was three years old and he had no smallest remembrance of her.

About four o'clock he heard a bump on the floor overhead, followed by the thud of footsteps about the room, and a very few minutes later Greg came into the study. He was wearing an old dressing-gown and carpet slippers, and he had not shaved, nor brushed his hair. He looked unspeakably frowsy and dirty.

"Hallo!" he said. "Whur's Maggie?"

"I haven't seen her since lunch," replied Martin. He had stood up when Greg entered, and now waited book in hand for him to sit down.

Greg grunted, went over to the window and closed the transome lights, then came back to the fire and sank into his particular armchair.

"I've got a nasty chill," he remarked.

"Yes, so I heard, I'm sorry," said Martin. "Miss Hamilton told me you were subject to them."

Greg stared moodily into the fire, his hands rammed into the pockets of his dressing-gown.

"Whur's Biddie?" he asked after a pause.

"I don't know. I haven't seen her since lunch either," replied Martin.

"She has her tea with us on a Sunday," said Greg, "and we sing hymns." He leaned forward and pushed the bell.

Martin made no answer, and carelessly opened his book again. He was not at all afraid of Greg at this moment, he merely despised him and hoped that he would not expect Miss Hamilton to have her tea in here with him and Biddie. Perhaps, thought Martin, with a flush of hope, he and Miss Hamilton might have tea alone in the desolate drawing-room. She would have to talk, then, and he might find an opportunity to explain.

Greg was going at the bell again. It was Miss Hamilton who finally answered it.

"Oh! Robin," she said as she came into the room, "are you better? Tea will be coming in a minute."

"Whur's Biddie?" asked Greg, without looking up.

"She'll be down directly," said Miss Hamilton.

The arrangement of last night was repeated. Martin, who had jumped to his feet when Miss Hamilton came in, taking the chair on the other side of the writing table.

"Are you better, Robin?" repeated Miss Hamilton as she sat down.

Martin frowned. Why didn't she stand up to the man, he wondered. There was plainly nothing the matter with him except that he had drunk rather too much the night before, and had been too lazy to dress himself. Why didn't she show him what she must think of his slovenliness? It was disgusting that he should appear like that before a woman. She had had no mercy upon himself, why shouldn't she be equally firm with this dirty Scotchman?

"I caught a nasty chill," said Greg, "dodderin' about with you in the rain last evening, and I'll have to be in the City by half-past ten to-morrow. There's a board meetin' at eleven and I'll have to coach Andrew; he's clever enough with his figures but a perfect fool at

speakin'. I'll be devilish busy this week, and I thought I'd best take care o' myself to-day."

"Why don't you go to the meeting yourself instead of sending Mr Andrew?" asked Miss Hamilton.

"Och! I can't handle the accounts," returned Greg with a chuckle. "If I could there'd be no need for Andrew in the firm."

Martin somehow received the impression that his employer's business affairs were not quite fair and above-board. What was wrong with the man and his house? he asked himself.

Greg continued to talk business and Miss Hamilton to take an intelligent interest until Hester brought in tea and a very spruce and cheerful Biddie.

4

She seemed to have changed her mind with regard to Martin, for she went straight up to him, ignoring her father's "Come along here, Biddie."

Martin was uncomfortable and awkward with small children, but he responded, now, to Biddie's overtures. She gave him, at least, a chance to speak.

"What's your name?" she asked, when the slightly embarrassed Martin had taken her on his knee.

"Uncoo Martin?" she asked, when he had given her that information.

"If you like," he said smiling.

"Now, Biddie, aren't ye comin' to speak to daddie?" asked Greg. "Mr Bond doesn't want ye."

Biddie took not the least notice of her father. "Are you going to stop here?" she asked.

"I don't know, yet," replied Martin.

"When will you know?" she asked.

"This evening, I expect," he told her, glad of the opportunity to give both Greg and Miss Hamilton a hint of his intentions.

"Mr Bond's goin' to write a book with daddie," put in Greg. "Now, Biddie, come away here or I'll come and fetch ye."

"Biddie, go to daddie," echoed Miss Hamilton.

Biddie stuck her thumb in her mouth and eyed them both with a look of cunning.

"I love Uncoo Martin," she announced tentatively.

Greg got up swiftly from his chair, and at that Biddie suddenly slipped off Martin's knee and went over to her father.

"And daddie and Aunt Maggie and Nanna," she said, by way of finishing the clause.

Martin thought that the way Greg pawed the child about and talked to her, when she had finally decided that it was wise to humour him, was perfectly sickening. He continually asked her whom she loved best, and would take no answer but "Daddie."

After tea came the promised hymns. Greg played them on the American organ, using a loud stop which partly concealed his uncertainty as to right notes. But if the chords were seldom those scored by the original composer, the tune came out famously at the top, and Biddie, though weak on the high notes, followed a line of her own through the difficult country with a certain *elan* which covered all defects. Her memory for the words was amazing in a child of that age.

Martin bore it for a time and then quietly left the room.

"Lord! what a house!" he reflected as he sat and brooded on the side of his bed upstairs.

But, for the moment, he was released from the spell. He owed nothing to Greg and cared not a rap for his opinion nor for that of Miss Hamilton. She was merely a nonentity with a beautiful face, and Martin was exceedingly annoyed with her for being a nonentity. He sat in the cold and thought about her and wondered how she could stand Greg.

Presently the plangent snorting of the organ ceased, and shortly afterwards Martin heard Biddie and Miss Hamilton go up to the second floor, the whole space of which was devoted to nursery accommodation. Biddie was talking excitedly, a sign that she had been good.

Martin waited a few minutes and then went down to the study. He was determined not to be put off by any of Greg's evasions; this conversation was to be decisive. No decent man could possibly live in that house.

Greg was stretched out in his usual pose; he had the air of one who reflected deeply on sad reminiscences. He looked up when Martin entered, and said "Och! come in and have a talk. I was just thinking about the book." His tone had a certain wistfulness; he seemed to welcome human companionship.

Martin came in and sat down. "I've been thinking it all over, Mr Greg," he said quietly, "and I've come to the conclusion that I shan't be able to take on the work."

"Why's that?" asked Greg. His voice was subdued and a little plaintive, conveying disappointment rather than his usual testiness.

"Oh! well, there are many reasons," said Martin, conscious that the most cogent could not be explained. "To begin with, it seems to me that it would be rather a waste of time. I mean I've been here twenty-four hours now, and you don't seem to have anything really definite for me to do."

He waited for the other to speak. He had thrown down a definite and rather daring gage, he thought; but as Greg only stared moodily into the fire and made no reply, Martin went on:

"And, for another thing, I'm afraid I'm not the right man for you. I've been reading a certain amount of Socialism since I've been here, and I've realized what a

big subject it is. And there are other reasons, too. So, I think, I'd better go to-morrow. I'm quite sure you won't have the least difficulty in getting a much better man than I am to take on the job."

"What are your other reasons?" asked Greg, putting his finger immediately on the weak spot in Martin's argument.

Martin frowned. "Oh! a dozen little things," he said evasively.

"Be honest, man!" replied Greg sadly. "It's no use at all to beat about the bush."

Martin looked uncomfortable and said nothing.

"Shall I tell ye the truth about it?" asked Greg.

"Well, if it is the truth," replied Martin, leaving himself a loophole.

"Eh! well," said Greg, still staring moodily into the fire. "The fact is that ye don't like the ways of this house. They're not the ways ye've been accustomed to, and ye're too young to make allowances. But there's another thing," he continued, putting up his long thin hand to stop Martin's protests, "and that's, maybe, more important still. It's just this, that ye don't like me." He stopped and looked Martin full in the eyes. "Tell me the truth, now. What is it ye've got against me?"

Martin grew very red. "I don't make friends quickly . . ." he began.

"Is that all?" interrupted Greg.

"Oh! well, no, it isn't, if you want to know," said Martin bravely. "I don't like your manner to me or to—to Miss Hamilton, and I don't like the way you go about the house without having shaved or brushed your hair. I daresay it's all rotten prejudice on my part, but that's how I feel about it."

He had burned his boats now, he thought. He did not like to meet Greg's glance, but waited, expecting and rather hoping for an outburst. If Greg lost his temper, the way of escape would be quite easy. It was a relief to have got it over.

There was silence for a few seconds, and then to Martin's amazement, Greg said, "Ye're quite right. I know it. But ye shouldn't judge me too soon. I've been sairly put about the last six weeks. I can't just explain to ye the trouble I'm in, in the City, but one of my partners has been makin' a mess of things, and I've been worried to death tryin' to get them straightened out. Maggie knows. She'll tell ye all about it if ye want to hear the particulars. On the top of that, Macaulays have been at me about this contract. That's of small importance, maybe, in one way, but I'm anxious to get the book done for many good reasons. But the worst of all is that my health hasn't been good recently. Now, I'm telling ye this in confidence, Bond. Ye may know that I'm an ambitious man. I've got powers, and I'll not pretend that I don't know it. I'm not askin' for chances, I can make my own, but I'm not wantin' Wotterhoose and his party to know that I'm sick. They have their suspicions, maybe, but that's a vairy different thing to a certainty. I want to use Wotterhoose and *The Gallery*, and they'll not help to have me put up if they think I'm likely to break down in the middle of an election. It's not common sense. Now, just listen to me. I know that I'll be well and hearty enough as soon as I have this business affair settled, and I've little doubt that I'll get things straight before the Board meetin' to-morrow mornin'. It's just worry and overwork that's been killin' me. I was at business till half-past eight on Saturday and when I came home I was just worn out. I don't blame ye for thinkin' me a nasty beast to-day, but I tell ye I was too tired to care a damn what ye thought..." He paused and looked again at Martin.

"I say, I'm most awfully sorry," he said.

"Whisht! don't apologize, man," returned Greg. "I'm glad ye spoke about it. I've no opinion of a man who's afraid to speak his mind. But I want ye to reconsider this matter of writin' the book. I'll not be able to pay ye a big salary, not more than a pound a week—

and ye'll be livin' in the house, of course. But I'll go halves in the book, and your name shall appear with mine on the title page. The way I see it, it'll be only fair to do it in collaboration."

"Oh! no, that's too generous . . ." said Martin.

"Och! don't blether," put in Greg kindly. He got up, went over to the writing table and took out a folded paper. "There's Macaulays' agreement," he said, tossing it to Martin. "Ye'll see that the royalty begins at ten per cent and rises to twenty; and we'll get a shilling a copy on colonial sales. The book's to be published at six shillings net."

He dropped into his chair again and sat quietly while Martin glanced through the agreement.

"But, look here, I couldn't possibly let you go halves," stammered Martin.

"That'll be my affair, I'm thinkin'," said Greg. "I took a fancy to ye the first time I saw ye—though I gather it wasn't mutual," he added slyly.

"Really it was," said Martin eagerly, "only . . ."

"Yes, ye've told me that already," returned Greg. "And I've apologized. I like your pluck all the same, for I've a bitter tongue when I'm crossed. Now, will ye stay and go on with the book? I'll promise ye I'll be more careful o' my manners and appearance in the future."

"Please don't," pleaded Martin. "I was a silly ass. I didn't understand. Of course, I shall be awfully glad to help you if you really think I should be any good. I'm only afraid . . ."

"I'll look after that," put in Greg dryly. "But I never make mistakes about a man. I've the insight. It's a gift I have from my mother—she's Highland."

Martin was mentally making a vow never again to judge a man by his appearance. How utterly wrong, how childishly superficial he had been about this man, Robin Greg. Hang it, the man was not far short of a hero.

At supper Martin found his chance to put himself right with Miss Hamilton.

A small decanter of claret had been put upon the table, and Greg passed it across to Martin, who refused it.

"That'll do ye no harm," said Greg, "or would ye sooner take ale?"

"No, I won't have anything, thanks," said Martin. "I never do take anything as a rule, and I'm heaps better without it." Then, feeling that he was on the best of terms with Greg and slightly elated by the praise he had received in the study, he continued, "Besides, as you told me last night, it's a pretty dangerous habit to get into."

"Ye're quite right," returned Greg shortly. "Maggie, I wish ye'd tell Hester not to burn the meat. This beef is absolutely uneatable." He had been picking over his food in a manner that was half greedy and half fastidious, and now he pushed his plate away from him with a gesture that was absurdly like that which had accompanied Biddie's refusal to eat her potatoes.

"I'm sorry, Robin. I'll tell her," said Miss Hamilton.

A minute or two later Greg got up from the table and went upstairs, leaving the other two alone to finish the supper, which as yet they had hardly begun.

Martin felt suddenly awkward. His confidence of a moment before had entirely deserted him. It was Miss Hamilton who started the new relations.

"What was it Mr Greg said to you last night about drinking?" she asked.

Martin raised his eyes and found that she was looking at him with an expression of strange anxiety.

"Oh!" he said. "He was telling me that several very promising young politicians were simply ruining themselves by drinking too much. Pretty awful, really, isn't it?"

"Did he tell you that?" asked Miss Hamilton. Her dark eyes were still scrutinizing Martin's face as if she doubted his honesty and was looking for the signs of it.

Martin flushed slightly. "Yes. He mentioned several people," he said, "well-known men, too."

Miss Hamilton's face fell. She looked away, and then with a little touch of confusion returned to her supper.

"Do you think you'll stay here?" she asked after a pause.

"Yes, Oh! yes, certainly, I think," said Martin. "Mr Greg has been awfully kind. He has offered to let me do the book in collaboration."

"Do you think you will get it finished by the end of March?" she asked.

"Well, I don't know exactly yet how much there is to do," he explained. And then getting bolder he said, "Shall you be staying on, too?"

"Oh! yes," said Miss Hamilton. "I've come to look after the house and Biddie."

"I don't expect I shall be in the way much," said Martin tentatively.

"Oh! no," returned Miss Hamilton with a touch of the shyness she had shown last night.

After that they talked more easily. They discussed the neighbourhood, and she told him that they were quite on the edge of the country, and that there were some delightful walks quite near. Any impersonal topic served. But when they had finished she gave him one word that completed the day for him.

They were in the hall and she had her hand on the newel of the staircase. "I don't suppose Robin will be down again," she said. "He wants to get a long sleep as he's expecting to have a hard day to-morrow. Good night. I'm glad you've decided to stay."

As he went to bed Martin was full of hope and plans for the future.

In the night he woke from a dream that he could not remember, and found that he had been crying in his

sleep. He got up and stood for a moment by the window, trying vainly to recall his dream. He was conscious of a feeling of desolating sadness.

A little wind had risen and he thought that he heard the faint cry of the swinging gate.

V. MARGARET.

I

DURING the next three days Martin settled down into what he supposed was the ordinary routine of the house.

There were two convenient trains by which Greg could travel to the City, the first at 9.55 and the second at 10.23. He took his breakfast in bed every morning, but it was always understood that he must catch the earlier train, and from nine o'clock onwards a sense of urgency pervaded every member of the household. The vision of that approaching train dominated every activity. Miss Hamilton's tap at Greg's door and her "Are you getting up, Robin," alternated continually with Hester's more vigorous knock to enforce and reiterate the instant necessity for haste. Each attack upon that locked door marked an increase of anxiety; the horrible influence of that relentless rushing train swelled until imagination heard the shriek of its last fatal warning.

The stress and concern culminated as Greg came hurrying downstairs to snatch his coat and hat from the pegs in the hall. For all his apparent indifference to the repeated calls upstairs he seemed at that ultimate moment to be no less affected by the strain than any other person in the house. He was irritable and flurried. At the least check he shouted almost hysterically for "Maggie." He found that his top-hat was not brushed, that he had lost his gloves, or wanted certain papers out of the study. And when reassured that his hat had been properly groomed, that his gloves were in their usual place on the hall table and that Martin had already found the required papers and put them in the breast pocket of Greg's overcoat, he would look at his watch

for the last time as he ran across the hall and make an ejaculation of surprise at the familiar phenomenon that he had only eight minutes in which to do a ten-minute walk, and finally close the front door after him with a slam.

The crash of the front door, completed and emphasized as a rule by the tinkle of the falling key, marked the close of a period. The house sighed a thin gasp of relief and suffered some change of character in the act. Stress and urgency had followed that slight figure which trotted a trifle erratically down the road to the station; and Garroch was relieved of an indefinable tension that had held it stretched since the previous evening. During the day Garroch nodded while the women moved about scrubbing, cleaning and polishing, revivifying it for the return of that tense watchfulness which would spring into life at half-past five, with the click of a latchkey.

Martin was still far from any realization of the double personality of that house. He did not understand, as yet, all that Garroch gained and lost between the farewell-crash of the morning and the click of the evening return. He was only conscious of a sense of relief. The day was before him, and he turned into the study and shut out that feminine world which necessarily regarded him as rather a hindrance during those busy hours that preceded lunch.

He, too, was busy, reading rapidly and with a laudable diligence; preparing himself to write a history of Socialism in three chapters. He added, unconsciously, his little note to the hum of the hive. The house dozed confidently in response to that soothing murmur of steady occupation. If it had been left to itself it might in time have fallen into the deep sleep which enfolded so many other houses in Demetrius Road.

2

Martin made little progress in his knowledge of Miss Hamilton during those three days. He saw her at meals; alone at breakfast, with Biddie at lunch, and with Greg at dinner; and in the evening she came into the study for coffee, smoked one cigarette and talked business or politics with her brother-in-law. But she seemed to be on her guard with Martin. During breakfast she was aloof and preoccupied. Doubtless the coming struggle filled her thoughts, and she reserved all her energies for the strenuous business of catching the 9.55. The consciousness of that train was so supreme in the early morning; every moment was a preparation for the concurrence of that final effort. And later in the day, even during the placid hours between ten and five, she gave him no confidences about herself, nor encouragement to speak of his own life and ambitions.

Martin told himself that she was a Scotchwoman and therefore cold and reserved (he was great on generalizations); that she regarded him as a schoolboy with whom she could have nothing in common; that for some reason or other—probably his disgusting exhibition on Saturday night—she had taken a particular dislike to him; and that he did not care in the very least what she thought of him. The last self-confidence was a source of some comfort, and he dwelt on it frequently, magnified it into a secret joy, and tried to live up to it by assuming on occasion an icy indifference whenever he spoke to her. He varied his attitude by an appearance of great absorption in the work upon which he was engaged. On Tuesday he pretended not to hear the luncheon bell, and did not come to the table until he was fetched by Hester.

“I beg your pardon—I was rather busy and I didn’t hear the bell,” was his formal apology on that occasion, and during the meal he was so abstracted from the

common affairs of life that Miss Hamilton had to ask him twice whether he would have any more curry. She did not, however, appear to be in any way affected by his detachment; she certainly made no effort to maintain conversation; and when Martin returned, at the earliest possible moment, to his work, he told himself that he disliked all Scotchwomen. He also decided for his own satisfaction that she was probably much older than she looked, and frightfully formal.

Immersion in Socialism usually distracted his thoughts from all other affairs, but on Wednesday afternoon the reading of Godwin's *Political Justice* led him to look up a reference he had noted to Mary Wollstonecraft. And as he read the details of her life, the appearance and personality of that remarkable woman became extraordinarily real to him. He spent an hour looking up other literature, and it was not until the scanty material at command failed him, that he realized that the image he had formed of Miss Wollstonecraft was really that of Miss Hamilton.

The realization startled him, and he put down his book and went to the window to think the matter out. All his foolish little poses and criticisms had suddenly fallen away. The influence of Mary Wollstonecraft's heroism was strong upon him and the picture, he saw, was of an idealized Margaret Hamilton, lifted from all the incongruities and cares of her present surroundings.

"She isn't free," thought Martin. "She has allowed herself to be bound by the little duties that she imagines she owes to Biddie and Greg. She is trying to fetter her soul by doing what any other woman could do as well, when she ought . . ." He was a little uncertain what it was she ought to be doing, but it was undoubtedly something glorious, something even greater than Mrs Godwin had done.

It came to Martin as a great inspiration that this was the true picture of Margaret Hamilton. Surely there was some diabolical influence in this house which

blinded him. He had utterly misjudged Greg, and then, despite the subsequent revelation of his own mistake, he had gone absurdly on to commit this even greater error. He saw, now, the explanation of Miss Hamilton's attitude towards himself. She was moving on a higher plane of being, despite her attention to household duties, and it was unlikely that she would condescend to take any interest in a worthless youth of twenty-three, absorbed in so trivial a subject as Socialism.

He blushed when he remembered his ridiculous assumption of preoccupation at lunch the day before. What a silly, cocksure, blundering ass he had been; how inflated with childish egoism to suppose that she cared at all whether he noticed her or not.

He had been right in the first instance, when he had seen her photograph in the next room, and had not that first inspiration been confirmed when she had sat in this very study on the evening of her arrival? Unquestionably all his subsequent idiocy had been due to the effect of his filthy debauch . . . Never again, as long as he lived, would he touch whisky.

He sat down and read once more the encyclopædia article on Mary Wollstonecraft. She had come to life for him. He noticed that there was little bibliographical matter, and determined to write a new life of her when he had finished the Socialism book. He had always meant to write a book of some sort, and had hesitated over his choice of subject. But here was a subject ready to his hand, and one in which he could become absorbed. Moreover, there was the mark of fate in this strange presentation of material, for was it not a miraculously appropriate time for such a book as he proposed? He saw himself as a champion of the woman's movement. . .

In the middle of his elation he was startled by the sound of the piano in the next room. He had heard the keys being dusted in the placid hours of the morning, but no one had played a note since he had been in the house.

He held his breath and listened. He knew that it must be Miss Hamilton.

She was playing so softly that he could hardly hear her, and singing, almost under her breath, Schubert's "Du bist mein Ruh'."

He tip-toed to the study door and opened it with infinite precaution against noise. He could hear more plainly in the hall, but he crept nearer and nearer to the drawing-room door.

She sang the song through in the same subdued undertone, and then he heard the lid of the piano gently shut down.

He felt that the time had come for expression. He tapped gently at the drawing-room door.

3

Miss Hamilton opened it from within. "Did you want me?" she asked, and he could see even in the falling light of the afternoon that she was blushing furiously.

"Oh! I'm awfully sorry," said Martin, "I only wanted to say that I hoped you weren't going to stop singing, you know. It's rather lonely sometimes in the study, and I was so frightfully glad when you began. I hope you won't think it rude of me, but I had to come out here and listen."

"I was afraid I should disturb you," she said. "I know you're very busy."

He wondered if she were chaffing him, but he could see no sign of a smile on her face. They had moved into the deserted drawing-room now and she was standing by the piano, facing the window.

"Busy in a way, of course," said Martin. "I want to get the book started and I've a lot of ground to cover, but . . ." Unconsciously he had subdued his voice and his tone fell until he became inaudible. But after he had ceased speaking, he could still hear his words sounding in

the room; there was no echo, but the sentence hung in the air. He could still distinctly hear himself saying, "I've a lot of ground to cover, but . . ." Yet the sound was not repeated; it was as if his memory of it had become abnormally keen.

"You see the room is so empty," said Miss Hamilton with startling pertinence.

"What do you mean?" asked Martin. "Did you know what I was thinking about?"

"I thought so," she said. "Weren't you noticing how one's words go on living in this room?"

He nodded. "But how wonderful that you should know that," he said.

She passed that by. "It's because this room is never lived in," she explained. "For a year before my sister died she hardly ever came in here, and since then it has been practically shut up. I think rooms become influenced by the people who have lived in them, and give their impressions to other people. But this room is so empty now, that it only takes and there is nothing coming out to beat down what we say and ride over it and extinguish it. Do you think that's all very foolish?"

"Oh! no!" said Martin. "Of course I don't. I think it must be perfectly true. But it's very wonderful."

"That was why I sang 'Du bist mein Ruh'," explained Miss Hamilton. "This room is so empty and so restful. There is nothing to beat one down."

"I see," said Martin, and then, because he could think of nothing else to say, he added, "It's certainly not a bit like the study."

It was too dark to see her now, but he heard her draw in her breath with a little gasp. Instead of answering him she sat down and opened the piano.

"Oh! yes, do please sing again," said Martin, and sat down on the little straight-backed settee by the empty fireplace.

She hesitated a moment and then began to sing "Lochaber, no more."

She had a sweet true voice that sounded delicately round and full in that little room. In range it was probably a mezzo-soprano, but it had the quality of a contralto, and her upper notes were happily free from the least suggestion of shrillness.

Martin thought he had never heard anything more beautiful or more sad. The Scotch was no longer a dialect to be parodied and made ridiculous in an English music-hall; it was the language of a people; a language plaintive with the eternal sorrow of life, vibrant with the free wild joy of the open; a language full of the poetry and romance of the North.

Martin hardly realized when the song ended; it still filled the room with beauty, with wonderful thoughts of mountain and loch and sea. They both sat quite still in the half darkness, and the arc lamp across the roadway threw thin mysterious rays of pale light on the floor.

Margaret was the first to break the silence. "Have you ever been to Scotland?" she asked.

"Not till this afternoon," said Martin softly.

She made a little sound of appreciation at the compliment, and although he couldn't see her he knew that she was framing a word with her lips before she spoke it, and he longed suddenly for light.

"D—do you want any more?" she asked, "or shall we go into the other room; my fingers are stiff with cold."

"I don't think I could bear any more just yet," said Martin. "I don't mean, of course . . ." he was going on, afraid that she might misunderstand him, but she cut his explanation short.

"I know what you mean," she said. "Please don't explain."

She shut the piano gently and had moved to the door before Martin could get to his feet.

"Shall I turn on the light?" she asked.

"Oh! no," said Martin. "Let us leave the room to its beautiful memories."

4

The moment of expression passed as they closed the door of the drawing-room behind them, and Martin, framing a speech that still lingered in his mind with regard to the perfect re-education of all that was receptive within those four walls, found that he could not utter it. Any show of that particular emotion which had influenced him a minute earlier, wore an appearance of banality in the light and warmth of the study.

"I will tell Hester to bring you in some tea," said Margaret, to break the feeling of formality which had so quickly invaded them.

"Oh! good!" said Martin feebly. "It must be nearly five." He wanted to ask her to join him, but he was afraid.

She hesitated at the door and framed that beginning of a word with her lips, but she went out without speaking.

When he was alone Martin discovered with surprise that he was shivering with cold. He was still crouching over the fire when Hester entered with the tea tray.

"It'll be gey cauld in the ither room, no doubt," she remarked with a smile.

"Yes, I suppose it was," returned Martin, and then noticing that the tray was laid for two, he said, "I don't suppose Mr Greg will be in for some time yet."

"Ach!" said Hester with scorn. "He'll not be wantin' tea," and left Martin to wish that Hester's utterances were less cryptic.

His uncertainty in the present instance, however, was quickly resolved, for as he stood staring at the happy omen of the two cups and saucers, Margaret came back.

She came in quickly and with an air of determination, as if she was deliberately fighting some doubt or repugnance that beset her.

"I simply must come in and get warm," she said in a

rather forced conversational tone. "I was simply blue with cold. Even in summer that room's never warm. It faces north, you know."

Martin wished to say that he thought the room was beautiful, but the words that came only expressed a conventional acquiescence to her criticism of the room's temperature. For a time, as they drank their tea, they talked as they had always talked until this afternoon, the superficialities of common, formal intercourse between strangers.

Indeed, Margaret had said that she must leave him to get on with his work, before Martin made any serious attempt to break down that rigid barrier.

He rushed it then, careless of immediate consequences. "Will you sing again, some afternoon, Miss Hamilton," he said in a burst. "I won't come in if you'd sooner I didn't. I'd be quite content to listen in the hall. But it does make a tremendous difference to me. I shall work ever so much better for it.

"I hope you don't mind my asking," he added as an afterthought.

Margaret had turned her face away from him and leaned back into the corner of the arm-chair which she always occupied when she sat in the study—a tall, high-backed chair with ears. She held one hand between her and the fire as if to screen her face from the heat.

"I hardly ever sing now," she said, after what seemed to Martin a very long pause.

"Why?" he asked. He tried to add something to ease the bluntness of the inquiry, but could think of nothing and so repeated his question in a lower tone, as if he himself were reflecting on such an inscrutable problem. "Why?" He leaned forward and gazed into the fire.

"Oh! for many good reasons," returned Margaret.

"But wouldn't you ever, I mean, just now and again in the afternoons?" he asked.

"I'm so terribly rusty," she said, without changing

her attitude. "And I'm sure you would bless me if I started to sing scales up and down for an hour or two every morning."

"Rusty!" ejaculated Martin. "Oh! I couldn't ask for anything better than your song this afternoon." He shrank from the idea that any mechanical performance of exercises was needed to produce that exquisite result. He had thought that her singing was divinely natural, the free and perfect expression of her personality.

She laughed, dropped her hand into her lap and looked across at him. "What a funny boy you are," she said.

He asked for nothing better than such a frank speech at that moment. It reached out over the barrier as no earnestness or emotion could have done. Nor did he desire any happier fate than to be treated as a queer boy who might be allowed to sit at her feet and worship. In the two hours that had passed since he had identified her with his newly-formed vision of Mary Wollstonecraft, he had crystallized his attitude. He had put her finally above criticism. She had justified his estimation of her photograph with a difference; a difference that he believed was an inestimable gain.

"I daresay I am," he said with a smile. "You must tell me when I'm very silly. I'm quite eager to learn, really."

"I believe you thought that one just sang by the light of nature," she said.

"It's perfectly marvellous how you guess my thoughts," he admitted. "Was I very stupid to think that?"

"I suppose it's a very great compliment," said Margaret. "But if you only knew the tedious hours I've been through to learn a little about singing, you'd realize that...well, that one likes to have the training recognized, too."

"It was just my ignorance, you know," explained

Martin. "Of course, an expert would have known at once. Where did you study singing? Is it rude of me to ask that?"

"Oh! no, of course not," said Margaret. "I really learnt all I know in Leipzig. I was there for nearly three years; and then I kept it up at home afterwards for some time. I used to sing in the Scotch musical festivals—chorus, of course."

"But what an awful pity to drop it," said Martin. "I mean it isn't one person in a million who has a voice like yours."

"Isn't that rather like flattery?" she asked.

"I didn't mean it like that," he said with such earnestness that she laughed again, and then suddenly changed the conversation by saying:

"What's the time? Surely it's time Robin was back!"

"By Jove, yes," said Martin, looking at his watch. "It's after six."

"I expect he's been kept in the City," said Margaret. "He said he would be very busy to-day." Her air of preoccupation had returned, and with it something of that cold formality of manner which had chilled Martin during the past three days.

"I must send Hester to clear away the tea-things," she said, and went out without any further notice of Martin, who had not even time to get round the desk to open the door for her.

5

Garroch had nodded a little longer than usual that day, but it had been awake and restless for an hour before its master's return at half-past seven.

He was in a more genial mood than he had displayed since Sunday, and talked continually through dinner of the failings of his partner in the City. The point of his criticism turned on the ingenuity with which he himself had saved the firm from a difficult situation. His com-

ments on Andrew's shortcomings were continually punctuated by his hooting laugh.

Miss Hamilton looked distressed and uncomfortable. She talked very little, although she appeared to take an interest in Greg's story and prompted him with an occasional question when he paused in his recital.

Martin did not attempt to join in the conversation; he was reflecting on the happiness of the afternoon, and wondering whether it was only a bright interlude or whether she would take pity on him, sing to him now and then, and treat him as a privileged schoolboy.

He partially awoke to the exigencies of the moment when Greg turned his criticisms from Andrew's stupidity to Hester's failure as a cook. The meat was burned to a cinder, according to Greg, and he was consequently unable to eat any dinner. He made up for the deficiency by eating apples when they went into the study afterwards, and his manner of rejecting all but the juice was not pretty.

Martin was relieved when Miss Hamilton went upstairs. She went earlier than usual that night.

After she had gone, Greg pleaded, firstly, that he was too tired to discuss the book that night, and, secondly, that he was afraid he had another of his chills coming on, and urged Martin to join him in a glass of hot toddy.

Martin's refusal was quite final, and Greg suddenly looked at him with an odd furtive glance of suspicion, but he did not renew the invitation.

After the whisky had been brought Greg took down a volume of Burns' poems and began to read them aloud. He gave full value to the dialect, but it did not appeal to Martin as it had in the afternoon. It may have been the particular selections made by Greg or something in his manner of reading, but it seemed to Martin that he brought out all the coarseness and boasting of the Scotch character; all that Martin admired least.

He tried in vain to recall the fine visions that had come to him during the singing of "Lochaber no more."

Perhaps it is the difference between Highland and Lowland, was his only attempt to explain the contrast.

He wanted to get to bed early, but Greg would not let him go and kept him up till nearly twelve o'clock.

As Martin crossed the big landing on the first floor, Miss Hamilton's door opened and she came out, still fully dressed.

"You're very late," she said. "Hasn't Robin come up yet?"

"No, he's locking up, I think," said Martin, and added, "You're very late, too."

"I've been writing letters," she explained.

"In the cold?" he asked.

"Oh! I wasn't cold," she said. "Good night."

"Good night," replied Martin. He noticed that she sighed heavily as she went back to her own room. She had looked disturbed, too, and troubled. He wondered why. He was unspeakably glad that his own conduct had been above reproach. He had, strangely enough, no conception as yet of the true state of affairs; no least suspicion of the strain that kept the house in suspense.

VI. THE INVADER

I

MARTIN tried to slip unostentatiously into his new place in the scheme next morning. He awoke to a consciousness of pleasure in life, an eagerness to begin the day. He had a feeling that he was no longer alone in the house, that in future there might always be some wonderful hour for him in the afternoon as there had been yesterday.

The early morning upheld his mood. There had been a touch of frost in the night and the air of his room was sharp and invigorating. From the bath-room window, he caught sight of the deep red globe of the sun on the horizon. He waved his hand to it in welcome, and remembered that he had not seen the sun for more than a week. He was downstairs before breakfast was ready, and went out into the garden to sniff the air in long breaths of delight. He was conscious of the abundant joy of life.

"Isn't it a perfectly ripping morning, Miss Hamilton?" was his first remark at breakfast.

"I saw you in the garden," she said, approaching the question obliquely. "Hasn't there been a frost?"

"Yes, rather," said Martin, "and it's all so fresh and jolly out there."

"What would it be like in Scotland?" she asked on a wistfully reflective note.

"I suppose you are very keen on Scotland," said Martin with a little pang of jealousy.

She was pouring out the tea and only nodded in reply, so he went on, "But there are some splendid places in England, too, you know. I was born in the Eastern counties, and on a morning like this, you get a wind off

the sea and the air is so strong you want to get up at six o'clock and run for miles."

Margaret did not appear to be listening; she made no answer to this appeal for the recognition of English ideals.

"I suppose it's chiefly a matter of where one has lived, though," said Martin, willing to admit a qualification. "Early influences, and things like that."

"I daresay it is," said Miss Hamilton without enthusiasm.

In the silence that followed, Martin reflected on the awful gulf of unknown life that divided them. Even he, in his twenty-three years, had had considerable diversity of experience. He wondered whether she had, perhaps, been the heroine of some tragic episode when she was in Leipzig. He had been in Germany once for six weeks, with a reading party, in the long vacation, and he recalled the atmosphere of Dresden, whither he had gone for the last week in company with one other man, after the Rhine tour was over. Dresden seemed to him, for some reason, more nearly related to Leipzig than any town of Western Germany. He remembered an early morning in September when the air was wonderfully fresh and clear, with a little cold wind coming down the Elbe. His thought of the place was so vivid that he had to find a vent for it in speech.

"Something in the air made me think of Dresden, this morning," he said.

"Oh! do you know Dresden?" asked Margaret with a sudden awakening of interest.

Here, at last, was common ground; moreover, Martin had earned for the first time in their acquaintance a right to be considered as a person of experience. He felt that a sudden weight of years had been added to him by those six weeks in Germany.

The conversation which had begun so inauspiciously became alive with interest. It is true that he was still the novitiate, little more than a tourist who had

caught a brief glimpse of German life from the outside; but he had the material for questions and Margaret could speak from her greater experience with the knowledge that he would, in part at least, understand.

She gave him no autobiography; they talked of German places and German people, but here and there he had some vision of her life in Leipzig. It was a relief to him to know that she had lived with a Scotch family there. He learned, also, that she was only nineteen when she began to study singing in Germany, and he gathered that that must have been about eight years ago—there was a mention of the opening of the Boer War in her second year.

The striking of the dining-room clock called his attention to the fact that they were very late that morning.

“I say, it’s nine o’clock!” he said guiltily. He felt slightly culpable, in that he had distracted her from her urgent duty, but the feeling was mixed with one of great satisfaction in the knowledge that he had been able so to divert her attention from the supreme rule of the morning.

He expected her to receive his announcement with some show of perturbation, but she gave no sign of surprise or alarm.

“I daresay Robin will be going by the later train this morning,” she said. “I don’t think he slept very well last night. Didn’t he disturb you?”

“No,” said Martin. “It takes a lot to wake me at night,” he explained.

“Yes, it must,” remarked Margaret with an ironical inflexion as she left the room.

Martin wondered what had happened.

2

At ten o’clock he began to grow passionately impatient for Greg’s departure. No sound had come as yet from the room above the study, and it would be impos-

sible for him, now, to catch the 10.23. Martin hunted out a penny time-table he had seen in one of the drawers of the writing table, and found that the next train, a very slow one, went at 11.5. If Greg was going to catch that, the usual assault upon his door should be beginning, but there was an ominous silence on the landing overhead.

Martin tried to absorb himself in his reading, but his attention was distracted by every sound. Each time he heard footsteps in the hall he believed that, at last, Miss Hamilton or Hester was going up to remind Greg that it was after ten o'clock. If he did not go soon he probably would not go at all.

Martin frowned, got up and stared out of the window. He was resentful. This was Thursday and there would only be one more free afternoon until Monday, if Greg stayed in all day. Surely he was neglecting his business, whatever it was. He could never get there till nearly eleven and he was usually home again at half-past five—short enough hours without taking a whole holiday in the middle of the week. Perhaps he would come down presently and do some work on the book; he had done nothing so far. And in the afternoon, instead of heavenly music in the other room, there would probably be hymns on that awful harmonium.

Martin felt that he was being unfairly used. He returned to his book with a strong feeling of resentment. He was making up his mind to go for a short walk to clear his thoughts, when he heard the first sounds of life from upstairs.

The origin of the sound he could not place, but the noise was the same as that he had heard on the first morning of his stay in the house, the noise which he had then compared to the retching of the bath-waste.

"Funny," murmured Martin, and listened with all his attention. The noise ceased after a few seconds and was followed by a low groan, repeated three or four times.

"By Jove, I believe he's ill," thought Martin. He put down his book and got up. It was his duty to tell Miss Hamilton at once.

But before he reached the door he heard a smothered exclamation from the room overhead, followed by the bump of feet on the floor. Then the door was unlocked and he heard Greg's voice shouting fiercely for "Maggie."

After that there was commotion. Apparently Greg was getting up and wanted hot water immediately, but when he came downstairs a quarter of an hour later it was quite evident that he had not shaved. He was worse tempered even than usual, and muttered and grumbled to himself as he put on his overcoat. He took not the least notice of Martin, who stood at the door of the study waiting to offer him assistance.

The final slam of the door shook the house.

Martin went out into the lobby and replaced the key in the lock. Miss Hamilton had not been present as usual at the last desperate combination of efforts, but as Martin returned to the hall, she came out of the dining-room.

"Mr Greg's gone," said Martin, looking at his watch. "I think he'll just catch the 11.5. I thought he was looking very ill this morning."

Margaret looked at him suspiciously. "What do you mean?" she asked. "What do you think was the matter with him?"

"Oh! I have no idea," he said frankly. "I thought he looked rather seedy, that's all. Perhaps it was because he hadn't shaved."

"Oh! very likely," she replied, and turned away. Martin received the impression that she was displeased with him about something; but could think of no way in which he might have offended her.

It was some time before he could settle down to his work.

The house had been impatient and resentful that

morning. Garroch had suffered terrible qualms, in fear that it might be deprived of its few hours of rest.

3

Biddie was naughty at lunch and afforded Martin another object lesson in tactics, by which he failed to profit. She had no specific grievance on this occasion, but the temptation to push her glass of water on to the floor was too strong for her.

The first attempt was thwarted and gently reproved, but when the two grown-up people talked to each other and took no notice of her, Biddie began to crave for excitement. The second experiment was magnificently successful—the glass smashed in a most gratifying way. Biddie blinked, pursed her mouth and stared at her aunt with an expression which said, “Now what are you going to do?”

For a moment the issue was in doubt. Margaret was very angry. She pushed back her chair and the flash of her eyes portended immediate corporal punishment. Biddie did not wait for that portent to mature. She slipped off her chair, ran to her aunt, climbed into her lap, threw her arms round her neck and hid her face on her breast. She did not cry but she clung tightly.

“Oh! Biddie, how naughty you are!” said Margaret, all thought of smacking entirely dissipated by this attack. She looked at Martin over Biddie’s head, with a whimsical expression of perplexity.

He smiled in return, signifying how impossible it was to reprove Biddie. Margaret’s weakness appeared to him as divine compassion.

The incident was closed by Biddie’s voluntary offer to be good. Hester was rung for to mop up the water and pick up the pieces of broken glass, and Biddie was given more attention until the rosy-cheeked, black-haired “Nanna” came to take her upstairs.

The other two sat on over the luncheon table for a few minutes after Biddie had gone—a new precedent—but the interest of casual conversation about Dresden had nearly evaporated, and when it came to a choice between a new topic or departure, Margaret got to her feet.

There was still a question to be asked, and while Martin was hesitating to frame it, she anticipated him.

“I’m going out this afternoon to see some friends of mine who live about a mile away,” she said. “Don’t you think it would do you good for a change to take a long walk? You aren’t getting any exercise.”

Martin agreed. He was keenly disappointed, but he found some little comfort in her thought for his welfare.

And the latter part of the day was to bring him other compensations. The walk undoubtedly did him good. He soon found comparatively open country, hills and woods and narrow lanes, where he could lift his face to the sky again, and open his lungs. His dreams were chiefly of patient service; of deeds of protection rather than rescue. Not once did he put the queen he served in any position that could detract from her dignity. He stood between her and the coarse world, and asked for no reward save that he might continue his service. He was so fervently earnest that he never once smiled at his own enthusiasm, nor realized that his dreams were not practical.

Greg was late again.

Margaret came into the study at half-past seven to ask if he had come in, but it was quite evident that she already knew the answer to her question. She had changed her dress, and was wearing a dark grey gown that Martin had not seen before. She had a strong well-developed figure and the dress suited her far better than any variation of the blouse and skirt arrangement she had worn since the night of her arrival.

She went and stood by the mantelpiece, her hands clasped behind her, facing Martin across the writing

table. The neck of her gown was cut in a little V at the throat, and she seemed to be standing on a platform waiting to sing.

"I suppose we had better wait," she said.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," said Martin. "Do you think he has been kept in the City again? He was very late going up this morning, of course."

She smiled rather bitterly. "Perhaps Mr Andrew has been making more muddles," she said.

Martin was confused. He could not misread the irony either of her smile or her remark, and they constituted the beginning of a confidence which he felt unable to meet. The mystery which surrounded Greg had suddenly thickened; and this doubt of his integrity coming from Margaret revived all Martin's original wonder and questions.

He dropped his eyes and played with a pencil, making a device of dots on the blotting pad. He did not want to continue the subject of Greg; he was aware for the first time that he was afraid to inquire too closely into the man's secret life; aware of something he did not want to explore. A vague suggestion that was curiously intimidating had come to him: a suggestion that Greg was not quite sane. He loomed terrifying and mysterious as a power for mischief or violence. What was it that had happened in the night when Martin had been so brutally asleep? He did not dare to ask. And through every emotion of wonder and fear ran a recognizable current of loyalty, of admiration, of something that was almost akin to liking.

"I'm afraid Mr Greg has a very trying time in some ways," said Martin, "a lot of responsibility and that sort of thing. I'm sure he's frightfully worried just now." He kept his eyes fixed on the pattern he so methodically pricked on the blotting paper. He did not see that Margaret was moved by his defence, emotionally stirred by a quick admiration for his loyalty, however uninformed of the truth. When he looked up, she had her

back to him, her forehead leaning on her arms crossed on the edge of the rather high mantelpiece.

"Poor old Robin!" she murmured, and for some time no other words passed between them.

It was Hester who broke the rather constrained silence. "I've takken in the meat," she announced, "you'll no be waitin' any longer."

4

At dinner Margaret displayed a new interest in the Socialism book, asking questions which Martin was not always competent to answer. She smiled at his admiration for her knowledge. "You're wondering how I come to know so much about it," she said.

"You must have read a lot," he admitted. "I think you know much more about it than I do."

She laughed and shook her head. "I pick up things very quickly," she said, "but quite superficially. And when I was here last summer Robin and I used to talk about the book in the evenings and I used to read up a little during the day, and mark passages for him."

"Why didn't you and he write the book together?" asked Martin. He did not care to think of those long intimate talks night after night with Greg.

"We were going to," said Margaret, "and then I had a sort of breakdown and had to go away."

"Were you here long?" asked Martin.

"Five months," she told him, and added, "I only went away at the beginning of September."

"I had no idea you'd stayed here before," he said weakly. He wanted eagerly to change the subject. He felt again that he was on the verge of exploring that obscure, indefinably repellent country upon whose borders he had so carelessly walked. For a moment he had a return of that first compelling desire to escape while there was still time; unconsciously he listened for the signal of that fretful gate. . . .

He made a strong effort and plunged back into Socialism. "I think I shall begin to get something down on paper to-morrow," he said, and began to explain the general plan of the first three chapters.

Margaret listened sympathetically.

After dinner they went into the study, and presently Martin found himself talking of his own affairs, his boyhood, his days at Cambridge and progressively of his ambitions for the future.

Now and again he interrupted his story to protest that she must be bored. But her reassurance rang so true that he was instantly convinced of her interest. Indeed, her interest was so marked that he felt a little puzzled. He did not guess that she was seeking distraction from her own thoughts, and that while she listened and prompted him with continual questions, her attention was strained to catch the sound she had been expecting for the past two hours.

It was not until half-past ten that the expected signal was given, and it was fainter than usual to-night as if the latch-key were turned furtively and with less than the usual vigour.

"Here he is," said Martin, breaking off in the middle of a sentence.

"Yes!" returned Margaret. Her eyebrows were drawn together and she made a tentative movement of her hand as if to ask for silence. Her whole attitude expressed both weariness and strain.

Martin heard Greg come quietly into the hall and go straight upstairs without pausing to take off his overcoat.

Margaret got up quickly.

"You had better go to bed now," she said. "I will get him anything he wants when he comes down. I heard Hester go up half an hour ago."

"But..." began Martin.

"He is sure to be tired," said Margaret. "I would sooner you went, please." Her tone left him in no doubt of the sincerity of her wish, but still he hesitated.

"Are you going to sit up?" he asked.

"No!" said Margaret sharply. Then she looked at him and her face softened. "Oh! you dear funny boy," she said, "will you please do what I ask you?"

"Is it all right?" he asked.

"Why, of course it's all right," she said smiling. "Why shouldn't it be?"

He obeyed her against his inclination. He wished that she would lock herself into her room and let him sleep on the mat outside her door. If he might have done that his happiness would have been complete. But in time he was certain, now, that she would accept his offer of humble service. That was a wonderful, ecstatic thought to sustain him through the time of waiting. One thing he had quite decided, he would not go to bed until she had come upstairs.

It was so cold in his room that he shut the window. He had heard Greg go downstairs and his voice and Miss Hamilton's in the hall, but since then there had been silence. From his bedroom, Martin could hear nothing of what passed in the study. He sat huddled in a travelling rug, his door slightly ajar, and listened. It was nearly one o'clock.

And at last he heard the study door open. He struggled out of his rug and stood up. He distinctly heard Greg's voice saying loudly, "Ye're makkin' a great mistake, Maggie," and then the closing of the study door.

Margaret was coming slowly upstairs.

He waited until she had reached the landing and then went out.

"I say, is anything the matter? Can I be of any use?" he asked. By the light that came through his open door, he could see that she was crying.

She shook her head. "No, no, it's all right," she said. "Good night."

She went into her own room and he heard her lock the door. That, at least, brought him a sense of relief.

He did not sleep as heavily as usual that night, and a little after three he woke from a dream of persecution to a realization of strange noises on the staircase. He jumped out of bed and opened the door. Something or someone was making extraordinary noises between grunting and singing, accompanying the performance by a continual thumping on the floor.

Martin switched on the landing light and saw Greg coming upstairs on his hands and knees.

He looked up when Martin turned on the light. "Whisht! man, dinna mak sic a fuss," he said. "Ye're drunk, man, ye're drunk, I tell ye." He crawled up another stair and began to sing.

"Here! Come out of that," said Martin. It was not what he intended to say, but it served as an adjuration. He went down half a dozen stairs and tried to lift Greg to his feet.

"Whisht, noo, steady, mon, steady," said Greg with a silly laugh. "Ye'll hae me down, if ye're no carefu'. Ye've no heid for the liquor, mon, none at a'. Let me get a hold o' ye or ye'll fa' and hurt yesel'."

By the exercise of considerable patience, Martin got him into his own room at last.

"Eh! mon, dinna gang," roared Greg as Martin left the room. "Ye're gey entertainin' the nicht."

Margaret had given no sign that she was awake.

VII. THE STORY OF ROBIN GREG.

I

MARGARET did not come down to breakfast next morning.

"By the way, did I leave the light on the landing last night," Martin asked Hester when she had told him that he was to have breakfast alone. The memory of that light had been his first waking thought. He had got up at seven o'clock and looked out, but the light had been turned off then.

"Och! it was you, was it?" said Hester. "I thocht it would be Mister Greg. It'll not be the first time by many."

Without doubt Hester knew. She must have heard the noise on the stairs. Martin felt ashamed for Greg. The whole affair had been disgraceful, repugnant. If the man had been quiet and decent about it and had not waked every member of the household, it would not have mattered so much. After he had returned to his own room last night, Martin had had a recollection of Bid-die's crying on the second floor. He had not noticed it at the time.

He wondered if Greg's attacks were periodic or whether this were an exceptional outbreak induced by financial and business worries?

Martin had never come into actual contact with drunkenness. He had heard it discussed at some length during the six months he had spent at the Seton-Mallory Settlement in Camden Town, after he had first come down from Cambridge, but the subject had not touched him closely. He had been inclined to agree with those of the residents who attributed the evil to social conditions. They used to say that drunkenness was

only a symptom with which it was useless to tamper, and that the root evil of poverty and unemployment was the thing upon which to concentrate one's energies. He had regarded the others, all those who rallied round Cecil Barker—and quoted him far too often—as fanatics, obsessed with an idea. Barker himself was a splendid fellow, of course; but even he must have been somewhat prejudiced by over thirty years devoted to a poor parish in Camden Town. And the present case only served to strengthen Martin in his opinion. Among the middle classes an analogy to the discomforts of poverty was found in business worry or other pressing difficulties. A man drank to forget his trouble.

Martin was satisfied with his explanation and was willing to believe that the mystery he had been afraid to explore was partly dissipated by this solution. He applied his theory to the facts that had so far come under his notice, and on the whole the result appeared satisfactory.

"Poor old chap, we must get him out of that habit," thought Martin. He was quite unaware that he had already taken sides against Greg; he did not realize that at that very moment he was anxiously wondering whether Greg would be equal to going up to the City that day.

He remembered that Cecil Barker had what he believed to be a wonderful specific for drunkenness, a patent drug; probably something you took when the temptation to drink grew too strong to be resisted.

The only element in the affair which seemed to Martin at once serious and disgusting, was what he supposed to be the cool deliberation of Greg's outbreak. The man had a tremendous will; there could be no doubt that he was able to resist the temptation if he wished; he must have calmly and with intention set out to get drunk.

Martin's face expressed his fastidious contempt for such beastliness; he found something typically Scotch

about it; he had a strong reaction against the glorification of drunkenness on the music hall stage by a well-known Scotch comedian he had seen a few weeks ago. If some of those who found the man so amusing had to live with it, he thought, if they had seen Greg last night coming upstairs on his hands and knees, they might find that in the fact, drunkenness was anything but a subject for laughter.

2

The day passed slowly. At half-past ten or thereabouts, came a repetition of those horrible sounds from the room over the study, but Martin was no longer in doubt as to their origin. He wrinkled his face into an expression of disgust—he was very conscious of his own cleanliness that day. This morning, however, no exclamation of surprise followed; the sounds ceased and a tense quietness reigned again. The house was to have no respite as yet.

Lunchtime came at last, but the presence of Biddie stopped any allusion to the events of the night before. Margaret looked pale and tired, and kept her eyes averted from Martin's glance.

When the nurse came to fetch Biddie, Martin hoped that the precedent of yesterday's making might be strengthened and that he and Margaret might sit on and talk for a few minutes—not necessarily about Greg, as he mentally qualified his wish. But Margaret got up at once and Martin made no attempt to detain her. He thought she was going out without speaking, but she stopped him as he was about to open the door for her.

"He's speaking at a political meeting to-night," she said quickly in a low voice. "He will be going about six, if he's well enough." She hesitated and framed a letter with her lips, but changed her mind and said "I must go, now."

Martin was sure she had been about to say "We." But even without the further expression she had said enough. She had taken him into her confidence; had for all intents and purposes made an assignation with him. She had crossed over to his side. He was no longer a stranger, an outsider, cut off from all intimacy with the household; he had become an essential actor, a necessary participant in the drama. And little as he had wished to play a part in that drama for its own sake, this co-operation now gave a new value to its every aspect. He found here the great opportunity which a few hours ago had been but a vain dream; the opportunity to devote himself, however humbly, to this wonderful incarnation of womanhood, to be of service to her, perhaps to shield her from pain and anxiety.

He could not endure the confinement of the house. That faintly sour, pungent smell had returned; it was in the study, it crept out from under Greg's door, it pervaded the landing and drifted down the stairs. He threw open the garden door and every transome light in the study, and went out into the thin drizzle of the November afternoon.

All had been quiet upstairs; he would go for a long glorious walk made beautiful by the thought of an evening alone with Margaret.

If Greg were well enough to go, she had said.

But it was hardly likely that he would break an important political engagement, Martin argued, and put the fear away from him.

Nevertheless when he returned invigorated to the newly-cleansed air of the study, and had finished his lonely tea, he became oppressed with a sickening dread. The house had closed in about him; he was no longer master of his emotions as he had been outside it.

He looked constantly at his watch; he could not sit still; he paced the room, or stared out into the darkness of the garden. He was irritable at one moment and depressed the next. It seemed to him the most important

thing in his whole life that Greg should attend that meeting.

Already it was twenty minutes past five and Margaret had said that he should leave the house at six. He was malingering, skulking. Perhaps he had already sent a telegram to say that he was unwell.

In his impatience, Martin could almost have reproached Margaret for keeping him in ignorance of what was going on. She might have come in for a moment and told him if the engagement had been cancelled.

He thought he heard her footstep outside and he crossed the room and opened the study door.

She was just going upstairs, but she put up her hand as a signal to him not to speak. He frowned at the restraint, but obeyed her, as he would have obeyed any wish of hers.

He remained watching her until she was out of sight, and then he heard her tap at Greg's door.

"Are you going to the meeting, Robin?" he heard her say, "or shall I get Hester to send a telegram?"

Martin reflected that he would not have displayed that tempting alternative.

The question was answered by mutterings from within the room, but Martin could not comprehend their purport.

He waited, tensely anxious, for Margaret to speak again.

"Oh! very well!" he heard her say, an ambiguity that left him more impatient than ever.

He waited, and in a moment Margaret came into sight again on the staircase.

He lifted his eyebrows and looked the question she had not yet given him permission to speak.

She frowned slightly and nodded as she passed him on the way to the kitchen.

He returned to the study full of elation, not only in the fact that Greg was going—he heard him out of bed, now, moving about the room—but also, and still more,

in the knowledge that she and he understood one another; they were friends, united by a common purpose and understanding.

Greg came into the study at half-past six. He was in evening dress, and still fumbling with his bow.

"Here, can ye manage this infernal thing?" he asked. "Maggie's no hand at it."

Martin neatly tied the bow for him.

Greg seemed in good spirits. "I haven't made a note of any sort," he said in a humorously deprecating tone, "and I'll have to learn my peroration in the cab; or use an old one. It's the most important part of a speech, the peroration."

He left the house with a laugh.

3

Margaret wore her grey gown again that evening. She did not come into the study before dinner, and throughout the meal her manner was a little constrained. She talked almost exclusively of her brother-in-law, and his gifts as a public speaker, and she gave instances of his readiness and wit in replying to hecklers. From that she went on to particulars of the meeting he had now gone to address; a local affair in North London, but Lord Coleman was taking the chair, and the speeches would be reported in the Liberal morning papers. A by-election would almost certainly be coming on in the constituency within the next few months, and the seat was regarded as an important one. All that she said tended to the glorification of Greg and she finished by saying with some show of enthusiasm,

"He may do anything..."

But she manifestly hesitated, framing the contingent she had not spoken.

"Yes, I'm sure he may," returned Martin. He was still under the influence of the scene of last night. He

could not harmonize the picture of the brilliant young politician with his vision of the obscene thing that had crawled up the staircase. And he was conscious of feeling checked, thwarted. He had stood at the gates of confidence, and now they were drawn against him. He was an alien, alone in a foreign country, suspect, and in no circumstances to be trusted with the secrets of the family with whom he temporarily lived.

"I wonder Mr Greg didn't tell me anything about the meeting," he said. "I might have made some notes for him perhaps."

"Oh! he'll do very well," said Margaret. "One of the best speeches I ever heard him deliver was given on the spur of the moment, without any preparation at all."

"What did he do about the peroration?" asked Martin. "Did he use an old one?"

She looked up at him with a touch of surprise. "What made you ask that?" she said.

"Oh! he was saying just before he went that he would have to use an old peroration to-night," returned Martin.

"Yes, of course," said Margaret vaguely. "Perhaps he did."

He was afraid, at last, that she was not coming into the study after dinner. She said something about writing letters, and her tone suggested that they would not meet again that evening. They were standing up then, and Martin was between her and the door. He could not face that solitude in his present mood; he pictured himself alone with the feeling that for some quite inexplicable reason he had suddenly lost all that he had had good reason to believe he had gained. He tried to make a big effort, but the words would not come; he was afraid of presuming too far on that implicit confidence she had given him; and he saw the danger of ambiguity: she might think he was attempting a familiarity for which he had no warrant.

"Aren't you coming into the study at all to-night,

then?" he asked desperately, and tried not to compromise the formality of his phrase by too urgent a note of petition.

"I may come later," she said. "When I get my letters done—if it's not too late," At each phrase she dropped her voice, as if aware of the futility of every added excuse.

"I want to talk to you about Mr Greg," said Martin boldly; her timidity and evasions gave him courage. It was her cold voice and high air that intimidated and quenched him.

"Oh! no," she said, suddenly putting aside all pretences. "Can't you see how impossible it is? How *can* I talk to *you* about Robin?"

"If you can't trust me, I ought not to stay here," he said.

"What is it you want to know?" she asked. "Haven't you seen enough? You have only to tell Mr Waterhouse what you've seen already and Robin will be damned."

"Oh! good Lord!" ejaculated Martin. "Oh! surely you don't think... Oh! of course, if you can think things like that..." He could not finish a sentence. He was less angry than shocked. What could he have done to give her so mean an opinion of him?

She drew in her breath quickly as if she had just avoided stepping on some live thing in her path. "Oh! Mr Bond, I'm sorry," she said. "But you don't know how difficult it has been, how terribly difficult it is. And how could I know?"

"But I want to help," he said. "I want to help you and Mr Greg. Oh! I want to help, frightfully. Don't you think I could? A little? Even if it were ever so little?"

"Let us go into the study," she said, soothing him.

And it was there, sitting over the fire, that she began her explanation by telling him that she *had* trusted him

instinctively from the first. "Yes, even after that first Saturday night," she said and looked at him, expecting the wince he inevitably gave.

She checked his apologies. "I know, I know," she said. "I was a fool not to trust my intuition, I am never wrong. But there is something about this place that possesses one, makes one always suspicious. Oh! yes, I've been suspecting you. I believed you were Mr Waterhouse's spy, and so did Robin before he saw you. But he was cleverer than I have been. He's been standing up for you to me. He said last night that he wouldn't trust Waterhouse, but he would trust you anywhere. He said..." She hesitated and went on, "He said you were clean right through." In her mind she was disagreeing violently with Greg's qualification that Martin was "a bit of a fool." "He likes you," she said, "and Robin's a staunch friend. He never goes back on a man whatever he does."

Martin's emotions were deeply stirred. He could hardly trust himself to speak. Inwardly he was elaborating beyond all reason that terse unexpected summary of Greg's. Again and again, he thought, despite the lessons he had received, he allowed himself to form biassed, absurd judgments.

"Oh! and I like him, too, awfully," he said. "I'd do anything in the world I can to help him—and you. I would, really."

"I wonder if you *could*," said Margaret thoughtfully.

"Won't you let me *try*?" returned Martin almost in a whisper.

For a few seconds they sat in silence, and then Margaret said: "Do you think you understand what the trouble really is?"

"I suppose he has outbreaks, sometimes, like last night," hesitated Martin, "and—and won't bother to fight them. I thought..."

She drew a long breath of amazement. "You thought that was all?" she asked.

That dark, mysterious, terrifying country was opening again before him, but he no longer shrank from the adventure. He was pledged, and more than that, he had a high mission. He was a true and perfect knight on his lady's service. He was in quest of the Holy Grail. Beyond the terrors of haunted country, he thought to find a great friendship, to earn the everlasting gratitude of the man he went out to save, to receive—ultimate bliss—the thanks and admiration of his wonderful Queen.

Did ever man have a nobler task?

"Can't you tell me everything?" he said. "I feel so sure that I could help you."

5

"It began years and years ago," she told him, "before he came to London. He was so brilliant, so clever. When he was twenty-three he was editing a weekly paper in Aberdeen, and he used to go all over the country speaking at public meetings. His people were so proud of him, and so were we. They lived quite near us and we used to see him often. I was only eighteen then—it was before I went to Germany. Elsie, my sister, you know, was a year younger than I am. It was her he came to see, of course, but we didn't know that at first; my mother used sometimes to tease *me* about him.

"I was in Leipzig when they got engaged, and I and every one were tremendously pleased about it. We none of us had the least suspicion that everything wasn't perfectly all right.

"I was at home for the Sommerfarien, when the trouble began to show. They had had suspicions for a month or two; all except Elsie. My mother and his people had never said anything to her and she hadn't the least idea. And there never was any open scandal. It might have gone on for years, perhaps, if he had not

got ill, but then, of course, the doctor and his family found out all about it."

"Do you mean that he used to drink then?" asked Martin.

"Terribly, I believe. More or less secretly, you know. It's in his family on his mother's side. He used to drink at the club and in the office, too, but not very much. It was at home, in his own room, that he really did the mischief. Steady drinking, you know, every day, day after day, and he was so clever over it, that even his own mother hadn't the least idea how bad it was, till he got ill.

"They thought he was going to die. He was in bed for weeks; but when he was getting a little better, he wanted Elsie to know. They had kept it from her all that time. And I had to tell her. She wouldn't believe it, poor darling, for ever so long. She thought I was jealous and was trying to put her against him. And then mother came in. But Elsie was splendid when we did convince her in the end. She sent a message to him that he was to make haste and get well so that they could get married at once. She had absolute faith in him; she was certain that he would get over it. I wasn't. We were all of us doubtful about that. We thought he would never be safe again, ever.

"But he convinced us. Oh! he was fine, then, fine. He came over to see Elsie as soon as he was able to get about, and he told her that he wouldn't trust himself for two years. She was ready and eager to marry him at once, but he wouldn't, although he was desperately in love with her. It must have been that that helped him so well, that and his having been kept away from any possible temptation for two months. And he has tremendous determination. When he's himself he can do anything with anybody, and with himself too. Just imagine that he went right away for a whole year, to a little island in the Shetlands where there was no chance of his getting anything to drink. He wrote a book on economics up there.

"When he came back, he was sure of himself again, but he wouldn't stay in Aberdeen, and even then he wouldn't marry Elsie until he had made some sort of a position for her. He came up to London, he had a little money of his own, and in a year he was able to come back and marry her. He is wonderfully clever in business, you know, as well as at other things, and after he had been working with his firm for nine months they were willing to take him into partnership. His father lent him the money for it, I forget how much it was—three or four thousand pounds, I think. Robin pays interest on some of it still.

"Well, he and Elsie were married and they were very, very happy. They were devoted to each other, and then Biddie came, and Robin was doing splendidly in the City; and he had never touched a drop of alcohol for four years.

"And then he took up politics and worked tremendously hard for the party at one or two by-elections. He was doing splendid work for them and every one was talking of him as the coming man, and said he was safe for a seat at the next election, but his health broke down. It wasn't very much, nervous exhaustion of some sort, you know; he isn't very strong physically; and he went to a local doctor somewhere who didn't know his family record, and advised him amongst other things to take stout.

"Well, neither Robin nor Elsie had any qualms about it. They thought he was absolutely safe, then, and he, of course, always had tremendous confidence in himself. But it was all over from that time. It began very, very gradually at first, I believe; so gradually that Elsie herself hardly knew when it was becoming serious again. She tried to fight it, she went on fighting it right to the end, but it was hopeless, hopeless, hopeless. He only laughed at her, and refused to take it seriously and said she was making a fuss about nothing, just as he did to me last night. Poor darling, she was so glad to die in

the end, so terribly, horribly glad. Even the thought of Biddie could not make her wish to live. Poor little Elsie, she . . .”

Margaret could not go on. Martin got up and turned his back, glad enough of an excuse to hide his own face.

6

He stood for some time by the window, staring at his own reflection in the uncurtained glass panel of the garden door. He was stirred by great emotions and resolves, willing to sink every personal ambition and motive in his eagerness to save Robin Greg. All else seemed little and worthless in comparison.

Margaret was the first to speak. “Mr Bond,” she said softly.

He turned and came back to the fire. He was suddenly conscious of feeling cold, as he had been after he had heard Margaret sing.

“So you see how difficult it is,” she said.

“But he pulled up before,” returned Martin, full of hope.

She frowned and looked down at her hands. “Do you know why I think he was able to before?” she asked. “Just because he was kept in bed for six weeks, because he was too ill to trick them or evade them. That six weeks’ rest gave him back control.”

“But he isn’t drinking regularly now,” put in Martin.

She looked up at him and smiled. “He hasn’t been really sober since I came,” she said. “Oh! I *know*,” she went on, seeing the look of doubt on Martin’s face. “Oh! do you think I don’t know! The different man he is when he’s not drinking. You’ve never seen Robin, he’s another man altogether.”

She paused a moment and then said, “It’s a pity you’re not more intuitive.”

He started slightly. "I suppose I'm not intuitive," he remarked; the thought had never occurred to him before.

"Oh! you're not," said Margaret smiling. "Not the least bit in the world. And you're making it so hard for me to make you understand. But don't you think you could just make up your mind to trust me? I *do* know. I was here two months before Elsie died, and I was here alone with him and Biddie for five months last summer, and I *do* know. Couldn't you try and believe that every word I tell you is just the bare truth?"

Martin blushed. "I do, Miss Hamilton, really I do," he protested. "I—I would sooner trust you than anybody else in the world. I admit it's a little difficult for me to grasp all the facts, but that's because I am such a blundering idiot; it isn't because I doubt you. I couldn't possibly do that."

"Very well, then," she said. "please will you try and 'grasp the fact' that for the past two years Robin has hardly ever been decently sober."

"Good God," whispered Martin.

"And, also, that only those who know him as well as I do would ever guess when he's drunk. Last night was an exception. In the ordinary way he would pass as sober anywhere. They'll probably never guess at the meeting to-night that he's been drinking steadily ever since he woke at half-past ten this morning."

"Up in his room?" asked Martin.

"Well, of course," returned Margaret dryly. "He always begins the moment he wakes. He has to."

Martin remembered his own symptoms on that first Sunday morning and decided that the very thought of whisky would have made him sick. To him, then, whisky had seemed loathsome, physically nauseating. No! He must admit that this thing was quite outside his experience. He must simply believe Margaret without question.

"I always know by his eyes," went on Margaret

"He gets a queer, defensive, cunning look, as if he were trying to dodge you. And, of course, there are heaps of other things. He's up to every sort of trick when he's like this. He keeps on pretending all the time, and he'll never admit it. Last night—oh! well, never mind; the thing is, do you think you can do anything? I know *I* can't. I've tried everything I know; and he's always been too strong and too clever for me. And he *hates* me when he's drinking, *hates* me, *hates* me. He tried so hard to get me out of the house last summer, but I held on as long as I could for Biddie's sake." She shuddered. "I held on until I thought I was going mad. Do you remember how hot it was in August? I began to see things—I have the gift of second sight, you know. I was so run down and exhausted."

"What sort of things?" asked Martin with a little shiver.

She shook her head. "I used to call them the 'drink devils,'" she said. "We won't talk about that. I used to see Elsie, too, and that helped a little, but she never came in here."

"I didn't know this house was haunted," said Martin foolishly. He was trying to be cheerful and to avoid an insane desire to look over his shoulder.

"Oh! all houses are," remarked Margaret.

"I see," said Martin, groping in his mind for an explanation of that large statement.

"The thing we are supposed to be discussing," said Margaret, "is what you think you can do. I may tell you that I have one threat, only one, that I can hold over him. I can threaten to tell his family. Even when he is at his worst that frightens him a little. Only what good would it do? They would have him put into a home and take Biddie away, and they would never forgive him. I believe it would be the end of everything for Robin, if I did tell them."

"Has he ever tried a cure?" asked Martin, "a patent cure, I mean. There was a parson who used to come to

the Settlement a lot, an awfully good fellow, who has a cure that he swears by. He's been running it for twenty years now; and I've seen lists and lists of cures that have been treated under his supervision and hardly any of them have relapsed."

"Would Robin have to go into a home, or is it one of those things you can give to people without their knowing?" asked Margaret.

"No, I'm sure you don't have to go into a home," said Martin, "but I'm not certain about the other thing. I have a sort of memory of hearing Mr Barker say that the patient must be willing. I could easily find out. I'll go to-morrow morning, if you think it's worth while, and see Mr Barker himself."

"I think it might be worth while to find out about it," said Margaret with a slight access of hopefulness.

She foresaw another of those terrible, hitherto hopeless, struggles, she knew so well; and the thought of it made her feel physically sick; but she realized a new difference in the quality of it. She would have a partner to work with; a young man, strong, healthy, determined, eager; without any physical tremors, uncursed by sensitive nerves or those weakening intuitions of failure. In anticipation she leaned upon his strength, and put him forward to bear the brunt of Robin's coarseness and brutality when driven to bay—he had had no respect for her sex at those moments.

"So do I, really," returned Martin eagerly. She was going to trust him, to let him help her, and all the varied emotions of the evening were fusing into this glorious culmination. He got up from his chair and began to walk up and down across the end of the study. He looked big and strong and vital; and his enthusiasm seemed to fill the room.

"It would be such a magnificent thing to do," he said, "and I believe we can do it. Oh! I'm sure we can. He must be made to see what a future he has, and how he's spoiling it."

"And if he won't consent to try the cure, I can use my threat as a last resource," put in Margaret.

"By Jove, yes," agreed Martin. He stopped in his walk, and looked at her thoughtfully. "Only there's one thing," he said; "it mustn't be a vain threat, if you know what I mean. You must really mean it yourself."

She nodded. "I know," she said. She was thinking that that had been her old mistake. Robin had always known that she would not substantiate her menace. This time she must be prepared to stake everything on a single cast. She looked up at Martin and wondered how Robin could have been so wrong in his estimate of him as to think him a "fool."

"We must concentrate every energy on this one attempt," said Martin.

He was thinking that if the attempt failed, either Margaret or himself, most probably both, would be compelled to leave Garroch. She would go to Scotland and he would return to Bloomsbury, and they would never meet again. If they failed . . . He was quite determined that they would not fail.

They were both strung to a high pitch of hope, enthusiasm, exaltation, when they heard a violent knocking at the front door.

7

"Whatever's that?" asked Margaret. She jumped to her feet, looking suddenly pale and frightened.

"By Jove, do you know what the time is?" said Martin. "It's nearly one o'clock. I expect it's—I expect he's come back."

"Will you go?" asked Margaret. "I didn't know it was so late." She had sunk back into her chair again and shut her eyes.

"I say, you're not feeling ill, are you?" asked Martin.

"No, no. Please go and let him in," she said.

The attack upon the knocker had been renewed with vigour. Evidently Greg had forgotten his latch-key, and believed that the whole house was in bed. He certainly was making no attempt to spare the susceptibilities of the presumed sleepers.

Martin switched on the lights in hall and lobby before he opened the door.

Greg was leaning against the door-post, his crush-hat on one side, his overcoat thrown wide open. There was blood on his face and on his shirt-front, and his right hand was wrapped in a bandage that glowed one sodden scarlet under the light of the lobby lamp.

"Och! it's you, is it?" he said.

VIII. FERMENTATION.

I

HE was very excited.

"Here, let me come in," he said, "and I'll tell ye all about it. Hoo! we've had a fine meetin', I can tell ye."

He lurched as he entered the hall and put out his right hand to save himself, withdrew it again quickly with an exclamation, and then propped himself against the newel of the staircase.

"Whew! God damn it," he said, "this hand hurts. And I've lost so much blood, I'm dizzy with it. I think I'd better just get Maggie to come down and bind up my hand again."

Martin had not spoken as yet. Hot with his new enthusiasm, he had had some thought of beginning his campaign that night; as he had crossed the hall to open the door his thoughts had shouted of victory. But, at Greg's last words, he had a strong revulsion of feeling. He suddenly hated the man for his selfishness, for this readiness to wake up Margaret in order to dress his hand.

"I should think you'd better go to a doctor," said Martin.

"Och! no, not I. I've no opinion of English doctors," returned Greg, as though that settled the matter. "I got this bandage put on by a chemist before I went into the meetin'." He laughed that horrible hooting laugh, and went on, "I was an hour late or more, but of course this explained everythin'. But when I began to speak, I forgot all about it and my gesticulation opened the wound again. Oof! the blood was droppin' all over the platform, and when I said that every good Liberal was willin' to shed the last drop of his blood for the cause, I can tell ye, I had an ovation."

Martin was wondering why Margaret did not come out of the study. He hardly heard the jumbled explanation about the accident to the motor-cab that Greg was excitedly pouring out, and he cut across it by saying abruptly; "Where's the nearest doctor?"

"Och! I'll not be wanting any doctor," returned Greg contemptuously. "I'll just run up and tell Maggie to come down."

"She's in the study," said Martin. He was standing between Greg and the door; he was quite determined that Margaret should not be allowed to bind up that hand.

Greg's face changed at the announcement. He stiffened, and his foolishly vacuous, boasting expression gave way to one of suspicion that was partly cunning and partly something more judicial.

"What's she been sittin' up for? Why doesn't she come out?" he asked, and looked doubtfully at Martin.

"I don't know why she hasn't come out," said Martin, coldly. "The point is that you ought to have that hand attended to properly. Isn't there a doctor somewhere near?"

"I'll not have a doctor, I tell ye," repeated Greg. "Why d'ye keep on haverin' about doctors?"

He had ceased to lean against the newel, but he still held it with his left hand. He looked past Martin at the study door, as if judging the distance he would have to walk without support.

"Here! Maggie!" he shouted suddenly.

Margaret was still sitting limp and relaxed in the arm-chair by the study fire. She had heard Robin's voice outside, but the meaning of no word had separated itself from the general stream of sounds. She was deliberately resting, reserving herself. The shock of that

sudden assault on the front door, following the emotional stress of the evening's reminiscences, had brought on one of those strange lowerings of vitality which had sent her home defeated ten weeks earlier. She was snatching a brief rest to brace herself for the new struggle.

When she heard Robin shout her name, she got up quietly, keeping herself in hand by a mental effort and opened the study door.

"Oh! Robin, have you cut your hand?" she asked without emotion. Her face was pale and expressionless; she seemed to be looking down at him from an upper window.

Martin turned and stood defensively between them.

"Och!" ejaculated Greg with disgust. For a moment the look of suspicion flashed out again, and then the usurping personality returned with new domination, returned urgent and active as if it had been too long defied.

"Hoo! Hoo!" he laughed. "We had a fine meetin', I can tell ye, Maggie. I was an hour late or more, and when I got on to the platform, I told 'em the whole story of my accident in the taxi. That warmed 'em up. And when I said I was willin' to shed my last drop o' blood in the Liberal cause, they gave me an ovation, I can tell ye. Ye see, the moment I began to speak I lost myself, and the habit of gesticulation was too strong for me. Hoo! the blood was droppin' all over the platform."

"You must have your hand seen to, Robin," said Margaret as soon as he paused.

"Och! it's all right. I had a bandage put on at a chemist's," said Greg. "I'll just get ye to put me on another before I go to bed."

"No!" cut in Martin, sharply. "You must tell me where I can find the nearest doctor, Miss Hamilton, and I'll go and fetch him."

Greg looked at him with a foolish smile. "Ye're vairy set on doctors," he remarked.

"Well, of course," returned Martin. He was quite determined that Margaret should not touch that sodden bandage. "Can't you see how dangerous it is for a cut like that not to be sterilized? You must have it bound up with proper antiseptics. Besides, you may have cut a big vein or something that ought to be tied. If you have it bandaged by an amateur you may bleed to death in the night, and you'll almost certainly get blood-poisoning."

"There's Dr Forman at Oakleigh, a few houses up the road," suggested Margaret.

Greg stood looking down at his hand, nursing it carefully in the bend of his left arm. "Maybe I'd better see a doctor," he said weakly.

Martin had used the one argument which had weight with the unhappy Robin. Even in his sober years, he had had a hypochondriacal tendency; and when he was drinking, the fear of death was a black horror that beset him whenever he approached again too nearly the arid, intimidating state of sobriety. The horror was about him now, suddenly clear at his very elbow. For a moment it took awful shape. His unsteady brain hovering on the border of normal consciousness, pictured the vivid germs of disease invading every passage of his body. He looked down fearfully at his wounded hand, as if he could see a swarming multitude of horrid forms that hung there seeking an entrance.

"Maybe, I'd better see a doctor," he repeated. "I'll go up myself." He looked up at Martin. "Ye might come with me," he added.

This newly substantiated terror had become more powerful than his suspicion of the medical profession. It was the doctor's knowledge, not his ignorance, that Greg feared in his heart.

"Oh! yes, rather; I'll come with you, of course," said Martin, with a sigh of relief. He believed that he had won a moral victory by sheer force of character; he had not guessed the presence of the spectre.

Margaret was leaning against the frame of the study door. She was thankful to Martin for taking this trouble off her hands, but beyond that she was only conscious of feeling utterly weak and tired. She wanted Robin to go, in order that she might get upstairs and lie down. Perhaps by the time he returned, she might feel sufficiently renewed to take up the fight again. She knew her own symptoms so well. Once, last August, she had lain incapable of movement for over two hours on the study hearth-rug. The nervous energy seemed to drain out of her until the fire of life dwindled down to a thin blue flame, without light or heat, but that yet burned steadily enough, however inefficient to animate her body. She was never afraid that she would die when these attacks overcame her.

Greg solved her trouble in seeking his own private purpose.

"You get away to your bed, Maggie," he said. "Bond'll look after me. I'm wonderin' why ye should have sat up for me," he added with a slight return of his suspicion.

"I wanted to hear about the meeting," said Margaret wearily. "I'm glad it was such a success."

She pulled herself together and walked steadily across the hall, nodding "good night" to the two men as she passed them.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked Martin.

"No, no, I'm a little tired, that's all," she said. "Good night."

Martin watched her anxiously as she climbed slowly upstairs.

"She's a puir, feckless creature," remarked Greg suddenly, when Margaret's door had closed. "If it had been Elsie, now . . ."

"Oh! come on," said Martin, roughly.

"Whisht, man, there's no need to make a fuss," returned Greg. "Put your overcoat on, it's a raw night; I'll be with ye in a minute."

Despite all previous evidence, Martin could have sworn that the man was perfectly sober as he walked quietly across the hall to the dining-room and closed the door behind him.

3

Martin rang the night-bell, the shining brass and black lettering of which were clearly visible in the red rays of the electric lamp which burned in the porch.

"Yes? What is it?" gasped a hoarse voice in his ear.

Martin started and looked round.

"The speaking chube," said Greg, and nudged him with an elbow.

"Oh! yes, of course," said Martin, and made the necessary explanations into the mouthpiece.

A few seconds later a light sprang up behind the fan-light, and automatically the waiting couple looked up and read the bold announcement of "Oakleigh" on the obscured glass.

"He's very prompt," said Martin in an undertone.

"Part of his business," replied Greg. "It's infernally cold," he added, and Martin saw that he was shivering.

After another short pause they heard steps inside the house, followed by the unlocking and unbolting of the front door, and the unknown Dr Forman was revealed as a tall, powerful-looking man of thirty or so, with a short, thick moustache; a dressing gown that reached his bare ankles was his only visible article of attire.

His first glance was given to the bandaged hand that Greg was somewhat ostentatiously nursing.

"Hallo! Come in," he said. "It's Mr Greg, isn't it?"

Greg's loquacity revived when they entered the neatly arranged surgery that smelt so strongly of drugs. He gave the doctor an account of the accident, of the interview with the chemist and of the consequences of his speech. He repeated all those details which Martin had heard twice already in the hall at Garroch, and laid

emphasis on precisely the same points. A sudden doubt arose in Martin's mind as to the truth of that now familiar story. It occurred to him that it had the air of a thing rehearsed. He thought of the peroration that was to have been studied in the cab.

The doctor had turned his back. He was testing the heat of the water in a tap that gave over a fixed basin. He nodded occasionally and made a conventional comment now and again, but his manner was hardly that to be expected of a young practitioner eager to propitiate a new patient.

"I think this is warm enough," he broke in finally. "Would you mind coming over here, Mr Greg? I expect you'd better sit," he added, and placed a chair by the basin.

Greg was not a good patient. He winced and exclaimed as the clogged bandage was slowly unwound from his hand, and when Forman had exposed the wound and began to examine it by turning back the sides of the cut, the exclamations were changed to ill-restrained cries of pain.

"It's a nasty cut," said Dr Forman, "and there may be some pieces of glass in it. I'll just dress it now, and give you a look in in the morning."

"Och! that'll be all right. Ye needn't trouble," said Greg.

"Very well. Just as you like," returned Forman carelessly. "You won't have far to send, if you change your mind."

He had dressed the wound and was now winding a bandage round the hand with clean, rapid movements. He had turned up the sleeves of his own dressing-gown and of Greg's shirt and coat, presenting a startling contrast between the development of his own muscular forearm and the thin wrist of his patient.

Martin liked the look of Forman, and remembered that there was a Guy's man of that name who had been expected to get his International cap.

"I suppose you're not the B. N. Forman who used to play forward for Richmond, by any chance?" he asked, when the bandage was finished.

The young doctor's face brightened. "Yes, that's me," he said. "Had to chuck it when I took on this practice. You keen on footer?"

"Oh! yes, rather," said Martin. "I was in the Emmanuel scrum. Not fast enough for the 'Varsity, you know, and they were a very hot lot my last year."

"See you again, perhaps?" said Forman, as Martin and Greg were going.

"Good," returned Martin. "I should like to."

That brief conversation seemed to give him a new hold on reality. Greg slid down another place; he was outside, and therefore beneath, the class of those who could thus recognize each other in any condition or surroundings. Forman had obviously not taken a fancy to him, and Forman was equally plainly "a good sort."

As they walked back to Garroch, Greg was repeating for the fourth time the story of his speech.

At the door, Martin had to find Greg's latchkey, which was in his right-hand trouser pocket, before they could get in.

"Can I help you to undress?" asked Martin, when he had locked up the front door.

"No, I'll manage well enough," returned Greg.

Margaret did not come out of her room.

Towards morning Martin thought he heard strange shouting cries somewhere in the house, but while he was making up his mind to sit up and listen, he fell asleep again.

IX. A QUESTION OF MOTIVE.

I

MARTIN, breakfasting alone next morning, had time for a cooler and relatively detached consideration of the emotions, resolves and events of the previous night.

He had waked to the thought of some task that was to be performed that day, a thought that had shrunk from nebulous considerations of the book to an urgent vivid nucleus, as he remembered his determination to effect the cure of Greg.

He took up that resolve with a new eagerness as he sat alone in the dining-room over his solitary meal. The business of it all wore an aspect recognizably romantic, even heroic. He saw himself as the instrument of victory, and anticipated the approval of Margaret. She was audience, and he wanted no other. He believed that there was no change, could never be any change, in his thought of her. He did not understand how he had grown in self-confidence, when she had deferred to him last night; how he had stood beside her and regarded her for a moment with eyes that were no longer strained upwards.

In all his thought of the cure he was determined to bring about, it was Margaret who filled the picture. Robin Greg, shrunk to a puppet, appeared as a simple means of glory, a conveniently difficult problem to be solved.

Martin was eager for the onset.

Margaret came to him in the study at ten o'clock. She closed the door carefully behind her and spoke in a low voice.

"I have seen Robin," she said. "He'll be going up to town by the eleven o'clock train. He says his hand is

better." She glanced up at the ceiling as she stopped speaking, as if to warn Martin that there might be a listener in the room above.

And it was to her glance that Martin first replied.

"Can he hear what is said down here?" he asked.

"Not the words," said Margaret, "but the mumble of it. He might be suspicious, if he heard us talking."

"I see," agreed Martin, accepting the probability of Greg's suspicion without surprise.

"I only came in to say," Margaret continued, "that I think this afternoon would be a good time to talk to Robin about taking the cure you spoke of last night."

"Will he be home?" asked Martin.

She nodded her head with perfect assurance. "He's only going up to get whisky," she said. "He will be home soon after four."

"Oh! I see," repeated Martin, determined to trust her absolutely even in this matter of prophecy; "but couldn't we talk about it when he's gone up to town?"

"Oughtn't you to go and get the cure, so as to have it ready in case you can persuade him to take it?" she asked.

"Oh! yes! I suppose I ought," replied Martin. He resented this necessity to leave the house during those few precious hours when Greg would be in town. "It won't take me very long," he went on, making mental calculations, "if I went now, I should be back by lunch time."

She did not respond to his assumption of the confidence established between them by their partnership. "I don't suppose Robin will be back before four o'clock," she said. "You have plenty of time. I must go, now."

"Are you feeling all right again, this morning?" asked Martin as he opened the door for her. "I thought you looked frightfully fagged last night."

"Oh, yes, I'm perfectly well this morning, thank you," returned Margaret. She looked distraite. She appeared to be quite unconscious of Martin save as a factor

in their scheme. Moreover, she no longer leaned upon him. She had given him his directions for the morning. Her whole will and mind seemed given to that man upstairs, the possessed creature who was crapulently ravening for the poison that was the cause of his present agony.

Martin sighed. "I think I'd better go at once," he said, as Margaret went out.

He wanted to be about his task without a moment's delay. He would have liked forcibly to administer the cure to Greg there and then; to browbeat him, threaten and dominate him. The man was a physical coward. Martin remembered the fact as a magnificent resource.

2

The feeling of urgency remained with him as he made his way by train and tram to the house of the Hon. and Rev. Cecil Barker—that dull house outwardly indistinguishable from any other in the long faded road which exhibited so little claim to its title of Acacia Avenue—but his urgency was no longer attributable to the desire to enforce a command upon Greg.

Martin had forgotten the number of the house he was seeking, but a trial venture at quite the wrong end of the avenue immediately furnished the necessary information.

The child of fourteen in a sackcloth apron, who answered the door to him, stared in wonder at his ignorance.

"Ow! Now! 'E lives at sixty-three," she said; and "sixty-three" as she pronounced it seemed to possess some peculiar claim to distinction; it was less a number than a description.

Martin thanked her and hurried down the interminable road.

His impatience was heightened by the information

that Mr Barker was out, and the man-servant who came to the door in his shirt-sleeves, seemed singularly unimpressed by Martin's importunacy.

Couldn't say when 'e'd be in; couldn't say where 'e'd gone, were all the answers he could evoke, and they were given in an uninterested voice which spoke of long familiarity with this type of foolishly urgent visitor.

"But I simply *must* see him," said Martin despairingly. "It's—it's really frightfully important." He had almost come to believe that there was a life in danger instead of the fear of losing a couple of quiet hours with Margaret. "Can I come in and wait?" he asked, after speculating inwardly on his chances of finding Mr Barker abroad in his parish.

The little grey-haired man, who looked less like a servant than an orthodox resident in Sunday morning *deshabille*, regarded Martin with a suspicious stare.

"You can if you like," he said. "I can't say when 'is reverence'll be back. Sometimes 'e's out all day."

"I'll wait for an hour, anyway," said Martin. He was full of resentment against the Vicar. A man in his position ought to leave instructions as to his whereabouts, and, a fortiori, he ought to employ a decent, civil servant.

For the next half-hour Martin stood at the dining-room window watching the street. The debate that filled his mind turned on the question of how long he ought to wait. Should he give the Vicar an hour, or two, or three? Ought he not to resign any hope of seeing Margaret alone that day? But at that point his defence assumed an appearance of weight. He argued that it was absolutely necessary to confer with Margaret before he attacked Greg. He must have his final instructions; there must be some sort of understanding as to plan.

He looked at his watch and found that the time was a quarter-past twelve.

"Oh! damn!" muttered Martin, and threw himself into a shabby leather-covered arm-chair.

The Vicar came in a little before one o'clock. Martin heard him in the passage outside, heard him call "Willis" to the man-servant in the basement, and then after a short interval heard him go upstairs.

Martin could restrain his impatience no longer; he rang the bell viciously.

"I say," he said curtly, when Willis came in hurriedly to see what the fuss was about. "Did you tell Mr Barker that I wanted to see him?"

"'E'll see you in a minute or two," said Willis, and went out again before Martin could vent his indignation.

3

And that futile sense of urgency still harried him when he was sent for at last to the study on the first floor.

He made a hurried apology and began to blurt out his want, the instant necessity for a "treatment" of the "Antol" cure for inebriety.

"It's a very important case," he concluded, having avoided almost by a miracle the introduction of Greg's name.

Cecil Barker smiled and twisted up one corner of his mouth, with an expression that was half-critical, half-whimsical.

"Every case is important, my dear Bond," he said. He gave to his sentence a peculiar value that lifted it from the commonplace. The pronouncement as he uttered it wore an air of parable. He looked steadily at Martin, enforcing a pause, impressing upon him the need for reflection before he spoke again.

"Yes, I suppose it is," said Martin, more humbly.

"Tell me more about this dear fellow you're going to help," said Barker.

"Well, I won't tell you who he is, if you don't mind," said Martin. "In fact, you see, I can't even say yet whether he will consent to take the cure or not."

"Ah!" was all Barker's comment on this reserve, but it perfectly expressed his disapproval.

"If it were only to do with myself," urged Martin, "it would be different."

"And out of your inexperience you believe that you are strong enough to deal with the case alone?" asked Barker.

"I mean to do my best, sir," said Martin. That consciousness of the need for haste was fading. He was coming under the influence of a personality that had swayed stronger natures than his. Cecil Barker had one supreme gift, the power to beget love and respect for himself.

"Ah!" said Barker again, and then after an effective pause he went on, "Very fine, all that, of course; very heroic and splendid, turning your face to the stars and calling on high heaven, but . . ." He concluded his sentence by turning to Martin and smiling—a sweet, faintly whimsical smile, that had some quality of saintly experience and wisdom.

Martin flushed and dropped his eyes. The bolt had been well aimed. "Do you mean . . ." he began, and stopped.

Barker drew his chair a little nearer to Martin's, bent forward and laid a hand on his arm.

"Do you love this man, my dear Bond?" he asked.

That question, spoken with a quiet earnestness that seemed to reveal astounding depths of sincerity, was suddenly presented as a vision of ultimate truth, the final key to all philosophy and ethics. Martin was dazed by his sight of so conclusive and simple a belief. A week earlier, he might have evaded the question, might have sneered later at Barker's profession of altruism; but in his own way, he had learned now what love meant to himself; all its possibilities of sacrifice, denial and strength. He knew that it was immense and powerful, and that while a man was upheld by it there was nothing he might not dare. And at the question he made new

application of his almost unrecognized knowledge, he saw with a new perception all that he might do for Robin Greg—if he loved him. And yet that woman, Greg's wife, had failed.

"How can one learn to love a man?" Martin asked evasively.

"By giving," replied Cecil Barker, "and by living the life. Come down and have lunch with me, my dear fellow."

Martin thought of Margaret. "I should like to immensely," he said, "but I must get back. My friend went up to the City this morning, and I want to talk it all over with his sister-in-law—she's living in the house—before he comes home."

"You won't confide in me?" asked Barker.

"I can't—yet," replied Martin. "He doesn't know, you see; and I don't even know whether he'll consent to take the cure at all. And besides, you see he's a secret drinker, and absolutely denies taking too much, and he's frightfully sensitive about it, of course."

"How long have you known him," asked Barker.

"Only a week, really," said Martin, after a short hesitation.

"And who gave you the history of the case?"

"His sister-in-law—last night."

"H'm!" was Barker's only comment.

Martin was conscious of feeling that he had been tried in the balance and found wanting. He wondered where-in his fault lay. Surely he could not be blamed for keeping back the name of Greg.

The Vicar had turned back to his writing table, and when he faced Martin again, his manner had changed. He was precise and practical. "As your friend is not a poor man," he began, "he will have to pay the full price for the cure, five guineas, and your name must be entered as that of the purchaser. You understand that the cure must be taken with the full consent and co-operation of the patient?"

"That is absolutely necessary?" asked Martin.

"Absolutely. The directions as to the manner of administration you will find in the lid of the box. They are perfectly simple. There are twenty-one small bottles, numbered in order, one for each day; and the essential drug is graduated, reaching its maximum strength on the eleventh day. Of course, it is absolutely necessary for the success of the cure that the patient should not touch alcohol in any shape or form during that three weeks."

"Wouldn't it be dangerous to take him off whisky too suddenly?" asked Martin.

Barker shook his head. "Not with this treatment," he said. "The drug takes its place. There will be no return of the craving after the first twenty-four hours. Have you got the money with you?"

"Five guineas? No, I'm afraid I haven't," said Martin. "I've got a couple of pounds or so, I think. May I leave that and send you a cheque for the rest when I get home?"

The Vicar nodded, and going over to a cupboard produced a neat, square, unlabelled parcel, which he handed to Martin. "Will you sign your name to this form," he said, pointing to the writing table, "the receipt will be sent on to you to-morrow."

But as Martin was about to take his leave, the Vicar's manner changed once more.

"Just kneel down for a moment, my dear Bond," he said "and we'll ask for success in the case of your friend."

But if it was the cure of Robin Greg that Cecil Barker desired, he approached the request circuitously, for it was the means rather than the end that figured in his prayer. He suggested, as it were, and that without any of the adulatory forms common in petitions of this kind, that his friend Martin Bond should realize the wonderful potentialities of unselfish love for the man he wished to save. And there were one or two phrases which seemed to imply either that Martin lacked the courage of his

convictions, or that he was unnecessarily secretive. "Give him strength to speak openly and without fear," was one of these, and Martin felt that he had, perhaps, been foolish and wrongheaded in not trusting the Vicar more implicitly.

But he was, apparently, forgiven at the last, for in the passage downstairs Cecil Barker laid an affectionate hand on Martin's shoulder and said,

"You've got a splendid work before you, Bond. Call upon me whenever you want me. I'm entirely at the service of your friend at any time of the day or night."

Martin left the house feeling that he had had a great experience, something which marked a period in his life. He was full of an overwhelming admiration for the man he had just left, as for some wonderful modern saint, moving unostentatiously among the swarming lives of London, and leaving everywhere the mark of his influence behind him. Even that little slut at the other end of the road must have regarded him as a man different from other men. On the one or two occasions that Martin had seen him while he was at the Settlement, the personality of Cecil Barker had left no impression upon him. But now he thought that he understood some of the eulogies he had heard at that time.

He was full of a great purpose to love Robin Greg; and in his present mood, that ambition seemed to present no insuperable difficulties.

On the station he bought a morning paper and found a report of last night's meeting. Considerable space was given to Lord Coleman's speech, and there was a note to the effect that Mr Robin Greg was also to have spoken, but had unfortunately been prevented by an accident.

4

Martin reached Garroch at half-past three, and found Margaret waiting for him in the study.

She smiled when he came in and rallied him gently on

the length of his absence, but she looked nervous and ill at ease.

"Has he gone?" was Martin's first question, and he subdued his voice to that conspiratorial note which was becoming the mark of that one topic.

"Yes; he didn't go till half-past twelve," said Margaret. "He said he would be back by five, but I don't suppose . . ."

"We ought to begin this evening," said Martin.

She shuddered faintly and leaned back in her chair, laying her hands along the arms. "Yes, let's have tea," she said. "Do you mind ringing?"

They hardly spoke again until the tea had been brought, and then Martin launched into an account of his conversation with Cecil Barker.

"He must be a very remarkable man," was Margaret's comment. She could almost have wished that Martin had not been so loyal; that this clergyman, the ideally strong man, as he appeared from that enthusiastic description, could have been brought into the conspiracy. She hardly believed, as yet, in Martin's power for influence in this matter. She knew all the difficulties so well; he knew nothing and had not the imagination to foresee the immensity of his task. Last night she had been filled with hope, but throughout the long day she had gone over the coming scenes with Robin again and again in her mind, and she was dispirited, full of despondency and dread.

"Yes, he is," replied Martin thoughtfully; "and he said one thing which seemed to me tremendously true. He said that I . . . at least he implied that one wouldn't have much influence over a man . . ." He paused again. He found the statement embarrassingly difficult to report.

"He asked me if I was very fond of Mr Greg," he said at last.

"And you're not, are you?" asked Margaret, understanding more than had been spoken.

Martin frowned. "I go up and down so about it," he explained. "Sometimes, last night for instance, I do, really; quite a lot, I mean; and then . . ."

"Oh! I know," broke in Margaret. "But don't you understand that it is the real Robin you like? Every one does. It's only the man you see when he's drinking that's so repulsive to you. And you've hardly seen the real Robin at all. That's what is so awful about it, to know that he's there and that you can't reach him, that he can't reach himself."

"By Jove, yes," murmured Martin. "I see."

"Do you believe in this cure?" asked Margaret after a pause. "Do you think you'll be able to persuade him to take it?"

"Oh! yes, rather," replied Martin quickly. "I know it's a thundering good thing, and I'm absolutely certain I'll persuade him to try it anyway. And that's really all that's necessary. Mr Barker says the craving for drink goes after the first twenty-four hours."

"After the first twenty-four hours," repeated Margaret thoughtfully. "But you say he mustn't touch anything, any spirit, after he begins to take the cure?"

"Nothing; absolutely," said Martin with great resolution. He felt strong and full of energy, and Margaret, if a little critical of his uninformed confidence, saw clearly enough that she would be foolish to unsettle it. Moreover she was gaining a measure of strength from him; his calm conviction, however ignorant, influenced her to believe in him, to doubt herself. Nevertheless, she had one stipulation to make.

"You realize, don't you, that you can't trust him when he's drinking?" she asked.

"I suppose you can't," returned Martin, and remembered the report of the meeting.

"He may promise to take the stuff," she said, "and simply deceive you all the time. Don't forget how clever he is."

Martin frowned reflectively. "I see," he said. "How are we going to get over that?"

"You'll have to be with him all the time," Margaret advised him, "for the first day or two, at least." She knew how necessary was that stipulation, and wondered how far it would shake his confidence.

"I can do that all right," he said without a tremor.

"You must make it a condition," she warned him.

"Yes, I will make it a condition," he said quietly.

She admired him greatly at that moment. She saw in him all the certainties and definitions she lacked herself. Only one thing more must be added to make her present image of him become real—success in the coming interview with Robin.

"What is the time?" she asked, suffering a spasm of nervousness on his behalf.

"Just after five," he said. "He ought to be in soon. I suppose I'd better see him in here before dinner?"

She nodded. "I'll leave you alone with him," she said; and then, "Don't you feel nervous?"

"Oh! yes, in a way," he said. "Like one does going in to open the innings, you know, when there's a big score up against you."

"Nothing more than that?" she said in admiration and wonder.

As he was about to answer her, they heard Greg fumbling with the latch of the front door. No doubt he was trying to open it with his left hand.

"Shall I go?" asked Martin.

"Better not," she said, and as she spoke they heard the door opened.

Greg went straight upstairs without taking off his overcoat.

"He has gone up to hide the whisky he has bought in the City," whispered Margaret. "He brings home the bottles in the inside pockets of his overcoat. He will be down again in a minute."

She packed the tea-tray and put away the little fold-

ing table and then, with the tray in her hands, paused and looked at Martin.

"B-be brave," she said with a smile, and her lips framed themselves into a delicious ghost of the words before she uttered them.

Martin would have cut off his right hand for her without a moment's hesitation.

X. THE COMBINED ATTACK.

I

DURING the ten minutes or so that elapsed between the going of Margaret and the coming of Greg, Martin was in no way occupied by thoughts of the struggle that lay before him. He was thinking only of the movement of Margaret's lips. She had stammered as a child, and that little trick of hers was a reminiscence of the method by which she had been cured; but to Martin it was an enchantment. She was coming to life for him. He was beginning to see her as a woman. And he believed that never before had she appeared so holy, remote and unapproachable as now.

The appearance of Greg was a brutal interruption.

He was in a sour, fretful mood. He found his own particular chair occupied, and scowled, although it was surrendered immediately he entered the room. Before sitting down, he went over to the window and noisily closed the transome lights.

If Martin had been seeking excuses, he might most plausibly have urged that this was not the moment to open the attack. But, full of ambition to serve Margaret and eager to prove his own ability, he hardly paused to consider the value of diplomatic opportunity; in his own metaphor, he was going in first for his side and he had to wear down the bowling.

He looked at the figure of Greg stretched out in his usual moody attitude, flushed slightly and then plunged.

"How's your hand?" he asked.

"Inflamed," replied Greg curtly.

"You ought to have it attended to," said Martin, "it's very dangerous to get a wound like that in *your* condition."

Greg's eyes narrowed slightly at that description of him, but he did not look up, and it was only the first half of the sentence to which he replied.

"I'll maybe see Forman again to-morrow," he said; "but I've no opinion of him as a doctor; he'd have done better to take to football as a profession."

Martin was not to be drawn into a side issue, however tempting the desire to stand up for Forman and his own class.

"I want to talk to you about all that, Mr Greg, if you don't mind," he said solemnly.

"All what?" asked Greg looking up quickly. His eyes were suddenly alert and vicious.

"I want to help you if I can," said Martin, and stared resolutely back at his companion.

It was Greg who first flinched. "I have no idea what ye're bletherin' about," he said.

"Please don't think it's cheek, Mr Greg," went on Martin, "but I want you to let me help you as a friend, if you will."

"Are ye hintin' that I've not paid your salary yet?" asked Greg with a sneer. He drew out a flat leather purse from one of his trouser pockets, opened it with some difficulty, and tossed over a sovereign. "I'd forgotten it was Saturday night," he remarked, and lay back in his chair with an evil smile on his face.

For a moment the issue was in the balance. Martin had jumped to his feet, his face flaming. His eyes were on the door, the chief thought in his mind that he must walk straight out of the room. Out of the room and out of the house, out into the clean, uncontaminated air; into the awful arid desert of an empty world in which he should never again see Margaret. Time stood still for him as he contemplated the horror of that dreary waste. He did not know how long it was since Greg had insulted him. But the attack had taken a new shape. It was no longer a trivial task he had before him, something to be lightly undertaken and conquered with a debonnair

smile, but an enormous labour that needed dogged persistence, that would call up his every reserve of strength and self-control, something gigantic that must be overcome because it stood between him and Margaret.

2

He was still standing when he spoke again.

"Why do you want to kill yourself?" he asked.

"Ye're daft," replied Greg contemptuously.

"It's certain that you can't live long at this rate."

Martin looked down at the hearthrug, and saw the sovereign lying where it had fallen. Mechanically he made a movement as if to pick it up, but changed his mind, and clasped his hands behind his back.

"If ye're practising your platform manner," said Greg, "ye can wait till ye're alone, or try it on Maggie. She'll have more patience with ye than I will."

Martin stiffened. He lifted his head slightly and looked straight down into Greg's eyes.

"It must be perfectly obvious to you, Mr Greg," he said, slowly and deliberately, "that I have no purpose of my own to serve in this. And I'm not going to pretend for a moment that I'm doing it for any ethical motive. But I've just got to have a try to help you fight this—this craving of yours."

"Eh, ye're daft," repeated Greg. He had met Martin's eyes with a defensive stare for a few seconds, but now he was looking down gloomily into the fire. "Ye're daft," he said again, but his tone had lost its sting.

"I want you to try a cure I've got," continued Martin firmly, "I know that it's . . ."

"Oh, hell!" interrupted Greg. "What in God's name are ye haverin' about? A cure for what, man?"

"For your particular trouble," was Martin's euphemism, which gave the other that chance of evasion he was seeking.

He gave his hooting laugh. "If it'll cure Andrew of makin' muddles," he said, "it'll be worth a fortune."

"You know perfectly well what I mean," persisted Martin.

"Ye overrate my perspicuity," returned Greg. "No doubt ye seem clear enough to yerself, but to me ye seem to be talkin' the damndest nonsense I ever heard."

Martin realized that he was losing ground. Some instinct of decency had restrained him from using plain language. He had shrunk from those coarse, brutal words that must lay bare the great open wound of the man's soul; that wound he had striven so desperately to hide. But there was no alternative. Martin was no match for the man in this give and take; his only hope lay in sheer determined strength. He flushed a little and then said firmly,

"I know all the facts, Mr Greg. I know you're drinking yourself to death. I know it's a vice that has got so strong a hold of you that you're no longer able to fight it by yourself."

Greg made a movement to interrupt him, but Martin raised his voice slightly and went on. "And I mean you to try this drink cure. In this particular matter I'm bound to treat you as if you were not responsible . . ."

"Hadn't ye better open the front door and call the particulars of my 'vice' up the road?" broke in Greg. "Ye seem very eager for the whole house to hear ye."

"The whole house knows," returned Martin.

Greg blenched, but he was not beaten yet.

"I suppose ye and Maggie have been layin' yer heads together," he said with a sneer. "She's daft on that subject. If I take a glass of toddy for a chill, she'll go bletherin' to every one that I'm drinkin'. Och! I have no patience with the fool nor with you for believin' her."

Martin laughed. "Don't be silly, Mr Greg," he said. "I've been in the house a week and you haven't once been decently sober." And disregarding the hoot which

greeted this statement he went on. "Besides, it isn't usually your habit, I suppose, to crawl upstairs."

"Och! just once in a way," muttered Greg. "I've been sairly put about the last month."

"And then there are all the lies you have told me. About the meeting last night, for instance. I saw a report of it in the *Daily Post* to-day, and found that you were never there at all!"

"Have ye told Maggie that?" asked Greg unexpectedly.

"No! I haven't," said Martin, relieved, now, that he had not referred to it. He felt suddenly that he would have stood a better chance in the struggle if he had been fighting single-handed. It was absurd, of course, but that sense of having entered into a conspiracy made him feel dishonest.

"Did ye bring the paper home?" asked Greg.

"No, I left it in the train," said Martin, wondering if this were another attempt to draw him away from the main issue.

"I'm glad ye've some sense of decency," remarked Greg.

Martin pondered that for an instant, but returned to the main question. "Will you try this cure, Mr Greg?" he asked.

"I don't need it," returned Greg. "I tell ye ye've got a maggots in your head. Ye're sufferin' under a delusion. Maybe I did take a little too much whisky that night, but ye needn't be afraid your modesty'll be shocked again. I'll swear off for a month and turn teetotal, if that'll please ye. Ye're a good fellow, Bond, and I'm not ungrateful to ye for botherin' your head about me; and perhaps it's not altogether to be wondered at that ye should have drawn a false inference from the facts. However, I'll promise ye to give it up. Ye'll take my word, I suppose, as one man to another?"

Martin was almost convinced. There was an air of such real sincerity about this speech. He could only re-

fuse the offer made to him by a direct insult. And if Greg had stopped there he must have won this bout, at least. But that alien personality within him, using his clever brain for its own purposes, over-reached itself in trying to gain further immunity from attack.

"But ye must not be too ready to believe everything Maggie tells ye," went on Greg. "She's just not sane on this particular subject. Her father drank, though she'll deny it herself, and she can never forget it. It's just an obsession with her." He looked up at Martin and saw the doubt on his face.

"I wish to God ye'd sit down," he said sharply.

Martin obeyed him.

"Look here, Mr Greg," he said, "in any ordinary matter, anything outside this . . ." he paused, groping for a word, and snatched at the one Greg had just used, "outside this obsession of yours, I would take your word against anyone, I would, really. But in this particular thing I know that it's part of the disease that you shouldn't tell the truth . . ."

"Ye're callin' me a liar, are ye?" Greg interrupted. He tried to put bitterness and anger into the words; he tried to pull himself together for a great effort, violently to confront and overthrow this boy who was opposing him. But he was feeling weak and ill; and deep within him a little voice was crying for help.

"Yes," replied Martin firmly. "In everything that relates to your drinking, you *are* a liar." He was winning now. He knew it himself. He knew how the man opposite to him must have felt when he had opposed his will to Martin's a few days before. He was conscious of an accession of strength and power.

"You *are* a liar," he repeated brutally. "You deliberately try to deceive me and every one, yourself included. You aren't to be trusted . . ."

"Och! what the hell is it ye want?" broke in Greg.

"I want you to put yourself in my hands," said

Martin. "I want you to consent to take this cure. It's here in the house. I got it this morning . . ."

"Whur from?" put in Greg quickly.

"From a parson I know in Camden Town. He . . ."

"Did ye tell him who it was for?"

"No, certainly not." Martin thanked God that his instinct had guided him aright in that matter, despite all Cecil Barker's prayers. "I didn't give him the least hint. I bought the stuff in my own name."

"How much did ye pay for it?"

"That doesn't matter now. The question is will you consent to try the stuff, or do you prefer to drink yourself to death?"

Greg sat huddled up in his chair, nursing his bandaged hand, and staring moodily into the fire. "Och! I'll think about it," he said.

"That won't do," returned Martin. He felt that he had his adversary down now, one last effort and he would have his man's shoulders on the floor. "You must take it. Do you *want* to die?" he said.

"Ye're making a great fuss about nothing whatever," said Greg feebly, and then as though he were conscious of his weakness, he began to ask questions about the cure, how it was administered, what it contained, what guarantee there was of its efficacy. He shot out these questions with a sneer, cross-examining Martin and trying to confuse him. But the witness had the upper hand. He replied to essentials, but he was not to be bullied.

"Eh! well, I'll take it," said Greg at last. "Where is the stuff?"

"You understand that I shall have to give it to you, and that I shall stay with you all the time you're taking it," said Martin.

"Och! ye'll do nothin' of the sort," said Greg, with a vivid return of his old manner.

"I must be with you for the first forty-eight hours, at least," said Martin.

Greg rose suddenly to his feet. "I've told ye I'd take the stuff . . ." he began.

"It is part of the cure that you shouldn't touch a drop of alcohol while you're taking the drug," said Martin, rising also.

"I'll not have ye in the room," said Greg.

"You must."

"I've given ye my word."

"I can't trust you in this. You can't trust yourself."

Greg murmured something that sounded like "Havers" and walked over to the window. For a minute or two he stood there in silence, looking out into the darkness. Then he turned and made for the door.

"I shall come up after dinner," said Martin, "and sit up with you to-night. We will begin the drug to-morrow morning."

Greg walked out without replying.

Martin heard him go upstairs.

3

Greg's bedroom door was hardly shut before Margaret came quietly into the study. She stood on the threshold and beckoned to Martin to follow her into the drawing-room.

"Well?" she said anxiously, as soon as the door was closed behind them.

"I'm not sure yet," returned Martin. "He has promised to take the cure, but when I insisted on being with him for the first forty-eight hours, he first refused and then went out without answering."

"He hasn't actually promised that, then?" she asked.

"Not actually. And I had him beaten, too," said Martin. "Oh, absolutely beaten; and he knew it and ran away. I . . ."

Margaret put up her hand and stopped him. "You've done splendidly," she said. "The rest is for me to do."

He would have stopped her. He knew now all the horror of a fight with Greg. He had been on the verge of absolute victory and he was exalted; but he realized the exhaustion that would follow defeat; realized in part also, how much harder was such a struggle for Margaret than for himself. And he would have interposed, have followed Greg to his room, and continued his fight, but Margaret forestalled him. She understood Robin better than Martin could ever understand him.

"No, no," she said, "You've done all you can. He will lock the door. He won't let *you* in, but he will *have* to let me in."

She went out of the room quickly and ran upstairs.

Martin, following her, heard her knock on Greg's door.

"It's me, Robin, Maggie," he heard her say. "I must see you." And then in reply to some question from within the room, "Yes, now, Robin; I must."

Martin, standing in the hall, heard the door opened and then closed again.

He returned to the drawing-room and began to pace up and down its little length. He was warm with enthusiasm for the victory of his side, eager to achieve the desired result. But a stronger feeling than enthusiasm was rising within him; a feeling of fear for Margaret. And as the minutes passed and she did not come back, fear with all its accompaniments of impatience, anger, resentment and dread took hold of him and swamped every other sense. He would have given up all that he had won to get Margaret out of that room; he would have given up any hope of saving Greg.

He went out into the hall and listened.

He was half-way up the stairs when Greg's door was opened and Margaret reappeared.

She came down, passed Martin without a word and went into the drawing-room.

He followed her and finding her already seated on the little settee by the fireplace, he sat down beside her.

"It's all right," she said. She put her hand on her

knee and drew it back quickly. He saw that she was trembling violently. She leaned back into the corner of the seat and tried desperately to compose herself.

"It's all right," she repeated, and her voice was low and shaken. "I threatened him, and he's promised. You're to sit up with him. And he wants to see Dr Forman. Will you fetch him?"

She had laid her hand limp and trembling on the padded seat of the settee; and Martin laid his own hand on hers, holding it firmly to give her strength.

"I shall be all right directly," she said, and smiled, but she made no effort to release herself from him.

Martin found that he was trembling, also.

"You can leave all the rest to me," he said. He wanted to talk to engage her attention in order that she might forget that he was holding her hand. He wanted to go on sitting there in that position, for hours, no matter what happened to the man upstairs.

"I can do all the rest," he repeated. "I'll go and fetch Dr Forman in a minute. It isn't far, is it? I don't want you to bother any more about it. Of course, I shall sit up with him to-night and I'll start the cure in the morning. Only, don't you bother any more, will you? Leave everything to me."

"He said you'd convinced him already," she said, and then added in a clearer voice, "Hadn't you better go? I believe dinner's on the table."

Martin released her hand with a sigh and stood up.

"Yes, I'll go now," he said.

"We mustn't risk anything after all we've won so far," she said. "This is only the beginning."

"Oh! it'll be all right now," said Martin with a fine air of conviction . . .

As he waited in the consulting-room at "Oakleigh" he looked curiously at his own, rather square, strong hand. It seemed to him an ugly, unworthy thing to have been so honoured. Her cold, trembling fingers had been so delicate and slender.

Martin got up at once from the dinner table when they heard Dr Forman coming downstairs. During the hurried meal Margaret had given some account of her interview with Robin, but the substance of it had been expressed in her brief summary, "I threatened him and he promised." It seemed that she had concentrated all her energies into that one threat and that Greg had believed in her sincerity.

"I meant it, I meant it absolutely," she told Martin. "I had made up my mind to go away to-morrow if he didn't give in."

They beckoned the young doctor into the study—the only room with a fire—and warned him not to raise his voice.

"The cut's nothing to worry about," said Forman. "I couldn't find any glass and I've put a couple of stitches in. But he's on the verge of delirium tremens. It's no use mincing matters. I suppose you've realized it."

Margaret winced and looked at Martin, who replied, "By Jove, no, is he really? I didn't know it was as bad as that."

"He must have been soaking pretty steadily for a long time, you know," said Forman, "and the inflammation from a wound like that brings things to a head. You very rarely get delirium unless there's something to set it off." He elaborated the technical details of his statement for a minute or two and then concluded, "Someone ought to sit up with him."

"Yes, I'm going to," said Martin. "I was going to in any case."

"You'll very likely have trouble with him," the young doctor warned him. "He'll probably try to throw himself out of the window or something."

"Oh! that's all right," said Martin. "I'm pretty strong."

"And he's as weak as a cat," added Forman. "Well, send for me if you want me."

"You're sure you don't mind sitting up with him?" asked Margaret when the doctor had gone.

"Not the least bit in the world," said Martin with a laugh. "Really not."

She gave him a look of admiration, but all she said was, "I must tell Hester to go up and light a fire."

"And I must find something to read," said Martin.

He turned away from her and began to peer at the bookshelves. He was afraid of appearing to encroach on the inestimable privilege that had been extended to him an hour before.

She looked back at him as she went out, but he was still intent on his search for a book.

He selected Marx's *Das Kapital* in the original German, and Frank Podmore's *Life of Robert Owen*—four fat volumes which he deemed sufficient to occupy him for the twelve hours he was to spend in probable silence. But at the last moment he added H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* to the armful.

5

Greg was lying on his side with his back to the door, and he did not move or make any sign when Martin came in, quietly locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

Martin found a decently comfortable arm-chair which he moved to the hearth-rug, and for half an hour all was quiet.

Then Greg, partly raising his head from the bed-clothes, said,

"What were ye and the doctor haverin' about in the study?"

"Oh! football," said Martin with a laugh. "Are you comfortable?"

"I'll do!" replied Greg.

XI. DELIRIUM.

I

DURING the first hour of his vigil, Martin tried to lose himself in Marx's *Das Kapital*, but as he groped his way through those preliminary formulæ and dogmatic equations, his attention was busy with all the detail of his surroundings. At eleven o'clock he knew little more of Marx's theory of value, but his impressions of the room were stamped so deep in his mind that in after years every sense of it could be instantly recalled by the sight of those perplexing pages. He could hear the occasional creak of the chair in which he sat, smell again with sickening realism the thin, musty exhalation of stale alcohol; and once more he would become conscious of that presence which, associated with the still figure that lay in the big bed, yet pervaded all the room, all the house.

Martin shut up Marx and putting him quietly down on the floor, looked over his shoulder. Greg was very still, lying on his side, his head nearly buried under the bed-clothes. He gave no sign of restlessness or fever.

Martin picked up *A Modern Utopia* and presently became absorbed in his reading.

He read on for over two hours before a sound from the bed snatched his attention from the contemplation of that almost perfect world he was studying. He looked round and saw that Greg had changed his position. He was lying on his back now, his eyes closed, one hand—the injured one—stretched out on the counterpane.

For a few seconds Martin watched him, and then, as Greg made no further movement, returned to his book. But within ten minutes an incoherent mumbling dragged him back again from the brightness of Utopia to the unpleasant reality of his present circumstances.

Greg was talking to himself in a low disconnected monotone, a few incomprehensible words here and there with short intervals of silence during which he made slow dragging movements of his wounded hand, as if he were feebly trying to draw it away from some imaginary danger.

Martin got up and looked down at him, but Greg did not open his eyes nor give any indication that he was aware of another presence in the room. The muttering and the weak movement of his hand seemed to follow one another with a recognizable periodicity, and Martin stood and watched that curious recurrence for nearly half an hour before he returned to his chair and attempted to plunge once more into the joys of imagination. He had had so clear a picture of himself, cleansed and beautified, walking in Utopia with Margaret. She had needed no such regeneration; his vision of her as she was, had fitted most perfectly into that beautiful new setting.

But there was to be no renewal of that vision for him as yet. The sounds from the bed were increasing in intensity, the movements were growing more vigorous, and the consciousness of them obtruded continually into that other world of Martin's, destroying the appearance of reality, thrusting itself between him and his fancy, as a material interference may break and destroy some exquisite dream.

Every other minute he was compelled to turn his head impatiently to watch the restless figure in the bed.

2

About three o'clock Greg sat up suddenly with a shout and stared at Martin.

"What the hell are ye doin' there?" he asked.

"Reading," said Martin quietly. "Do you want anything?"

Greg's eyes were bright and he looked about him as if

he were uncertain of his surroundings; his hair was tousled and stuck out from his head in curious tufts that sprang out at all angles.

"What for are ye readin' in my room?" he asked.

"I'm sitting up with you," said Martin. "Hadn't you better lie down again, and try to go to sleep?" He got up from his chair and stood with his hands on the rail at the foot of the bed. He wanted to be prepared for a rush. He imagined that his patient might become violent at any moment.

Greg, however, seemed to be reflecting deeply. The wildness was dying out of his eyes, and he put up his left hand to his head and made a tentative movement as if to smooth his ruffled hair.

"Eh! well," he said deliberately, after a long pause, "I'll not have ye in here."

"Oh! yes, you will," returned Martin with equal composure.

Greg did not answer him in words, but he threw back the sheet and blankets and swung himself into a sitting position on the side of the bed.

"What are you going to do?" asked Martin, getting between Greg and the open spaces of the room. A large wardrobe on that side diminished the passage way; strategically, Martin was well placed.

"I'm goin' to turn ye out," replied Greg. He got to his feet and tried to open the door. He fumbled with the handle for a moment before he realized that the door was locked.

"Who locked this door?" he asked aggressively.

"I did," said Martin.

"Where's the key?"

"In my pocket."

Greg stretched out his hand authoritatively. "Give it to me," he said. He appeared perfectly sober and reasonable.

"Oh! don't be a silly ass," returned Martin uneasily. "Get back to bed."

"Give me that key," insisted Greg, raising his voice.

Martin shook his head and tried to look bored. "Go back to bed," he countered.

He saw very clearly that this duel was immensely critical. He had physical strength on his side; the key could not be taken from him by force; he need only refuse persistently. He had a further advantage in that he was fully dressed while his adversary with his wild hair and bare feet, clothed in pink cotton pyjamas, presented a figure that commanded no respect. Martin was fully aware of these things; he consciously weighed and appreciated them.

Greg, on the other hand, was weighing no advantages of strength or prestige; he was simply intent on a single object.

"Here, let me come to the fire, I'm cold," he said.

"Better get back to bed," said Martin.

"Is this your house or mine?" asked Greg with a sneer, and then went on. "Do ye think ye can come in here and keep me from my own fireside? What's it to do with you? I tell ye I'll do what I like in my own house. Get out of my way and let me come to the fire; we'll talk this matter out. I've allowed ye certain privileges and I'm ready to admit that till now ye've behaved decently enough, but let's have no more of this bullying and foolishness; ye mustn't presume too far, I'll not have it. Now, Bond, let me come by."

He spoke with a quiet authority that Martin found inexplicably compelling; moreover all that he had said was so perfectly reasonable. The next argument was finally convincing.

"I've given ye permission," Greg continued, "to give me this cure and to watch me while I take it, but I've not given ye permission to treat me as a criminal or a lunatic; to lock me in my own room and tell me I must not go and sit by my own fire. Ye must see for yerself that ye're making a fool of yerself, Bond, and if ye

persist I'll have no more to do with the affair, ye can empty your damned cure down the sink."

"Oh! of course, you can go and sit by the fire if you like," said Martin. "I think you'd be better in bed, that's all." He saw the reasonableness of all that Greg had said; and if he refused now to take the cure there would be no means of compelling him. The man must be humoured within limits.

He stood aside and allowed Greg to pass.

3

He took the seat recently occupied by Martin, who brought up a small bedroom chair and sat down between Greg and the window.

"I'm glad ye've still a little discretion," remarked Greg after a short silence. He leaned forward, nursing his wounded hand.

"It isn't that," said Martin. He believed that if he could only state his case, he would have surer ground for action. He wanted to obtain licence for a greater stringency. "You know what we said in the study this evening—and you agreed then—in this particular thing you can't trust yourself . . ."

Greg broke in quickly, raising his voice to drown Martin's statement. "I know well enough what ye said, and what I said," was all the admission he made, "and ye talked a lot of nonsense which I'll not trouble ye to repeat now. What I did not say, however, was that ye might treat me as ye were tryin' to treat me just now. I'm not the man to stand it. If ye'll be sensible, Bond, I'll try and bear with ye, though I find it uncommonly difficult at times. Ye're altogether too prejudiced. All yer trainin's against ye. It's wrapped ye about till ye're less a man than a convention. Now, just look at the matter as a man and use yer common sense. Is it any way probable that I'll submit to lettin' ye order me here and

there? I tell ye if ye go that way about this affair, I'll have no hand in it. Ye and Maggie may go to hell for all I care, ye can do yer worst, the two of ye, but ye'll not make me take any silly cure that way. Now, have ye got that clear in your mind?"

"Yes, I quite understand that," said Martin; "but you've got to be reasonable too. I mean that you've got to let me help you for forty-eight hours..."

"Och! yes, ye can *help* me," put in Greg quickly, "but ye'll not help me the way ye've set about it. Ye must trust me—within limits. I'm not the sort of man that can endure to be ordered. I just cannot endure it."

He was growing restless again. He turned and looked doubtfully at the bed and then made a movement as if to rise from his chair.

"Now then, Bond," he went on with a touch of irritation, "give me that key. I cannot thole the feelin' that I'm lockit in. It's not reasonable." He got to his feet and held out his hand. "I'll give ye my word I'll not be drinkin' anything," he concluded.

"He's up to every trick when he's like this," Margaret had said, and the words came back to Martin as some quotation he had been subconsciously seeking. It was not in some ways a matter of vital importance whether Greg drank at this moment or not, but it was vital that a precedent should be established. To give way at the outset was to weaken hopelessly his whole position. If he were beaten now, he would be beaten again when a single drink would mean the complete failure of the cure. Martin set his teeth and deliberately put all arguments from his mind. He must not consider reasonableness. He must tackle this man with the same singleness of purpose he would have brought to the tackling of a fast three-quarter almost within reach of touch. He must give no thought to the result. If he was turned out of the house, if Greg misrepresented the affair to Waterhouse, it was of little consequence. Whatever happened he would have one all-sufficient

consolation; Margaret would know that he had done his utmost.

Martin stood up. "No, I won't give you the key, Mr Greg," he said.

"By God, ye shall," Greg returned. His eyes had grown brighter again, his face was flushed, he was losing control of himself.

"I shall not," Martin repeated.

Greg made a sudden movement towards the door and Martin took two quick steps and blocked the narrow passage between the wardrobe and the foot of the bed.

"I'll smash the door down," Greg threatened, and backed away as if he were meditating a rush.

Martin stood firm, leaning forward, braced and ready for any attack. He did not care now. He was quite undaunted by the physical threat. Not until Greg suddenly turned and snatched a razor from the dressing table did Martin realize that the whole movement had been a trick.

"Noo, then, ma bairnie," said Greg triumphantly. "will ye gie me that key?" He waved the razor in his bandaged right hand and took a little dancing step into the room. He was grinning horribly. He looked—as he was for the moment—a madman.

"Ye'd no care to be found wi' yer crag slit, ah'm thinkin'," he jeered, and hooted with glee at his threat. "That'd maybe spoil yer bonnie looks."

Martin, however slow his mental processes, was physically alert enough. From his boyhood he had been trained to proficiency in games that demanded a steady eye and quick responses, and that had moreover further developed his natural endurance and courage. He was in no way afraid now to face a madman armed with a razor; he stood, keen and wary, with no thought of dominating his antagonist by a display of fearlessness, but simply intent on finding a physical advantage.

Greg took another step forward and hesitated; then

as if suddenly nerved to make the attack he lifted his razor and made a wild lunging slash.

Martin had been waiting for that. His arm shot out and he caught and gripped Greg's wrist.

"Och! me hand," Greg cried out. The razor fell harmlessly on the floor between them.

"Mind me hand," he repeated plaintively.

Martin was afraid of another strategy. "You weren't going to be so careful of my throat," he said. "Now, will you go back to bed?"

Greg did not answer. He was swaying on his feet, his eyes were half closed, the flush had died from his face.

"Here, you're not going to faint, are you?" asked Martin, still suspicious of some trick. He loosed his grip of that injured hand, bent slightly, and taking hold of Greg, lifted him without any great effort and laid him on the bed.

He lay there without movement. He looked a poor, weak, pitiful thing, slight and helpless. Martin forgot the attack that had been made upon him. He was suddenly remorseful and tender. He examined Greg's wounded hand, but if it had begun to bleed again the blood had not yet soaked through the bandage; the fingers were very cold. Martin lifted the limp body again, put Greg back into bed, and covered him up to the chin.

He was afraid for a moment that the man might be dead. He bent over him and listened to his breathing. It was slow and rather irregular, as was also the pulse that he examined.

He wondered uneasily if he ought to call Margaret.

But even as he put his hand into his pocket to take out the key, Greg opened his eyes.

"Ye're gey strong," he said, and smiled feebly.

"I say, I hope I didn't hurt you," said Martin anxiously.

"I'll do. Let me be," replied Greg, and closed his eyes again.

Martin watched him for a few minutes and then, after

replacing the razor on the dressing table, returned to his armchair.

He found astonishingly that the time was only half-past three.

4

All fear of surprise and attack had left him. He did not even trouble to hide now the razors which he had so foolishly left exposed on the dressing-table. But the thought of that carelessness brought him to an examination of his incompetence; he saw that he had no more talent for planning a scheme than he had for carrying it out. He had no intuitions, he reflected, exaggerating his weaknesses; he was too slow and at the same time too cock-sure. Perhaps, he was falling into the same errors at that very moment.

He got up and went over to the bed.

Greg was lying on his back, breathing heavily, his eyes closed. It was impossible to say whether he was awake or asleep. He looked utterly exhausted and yet as if his rest were bringing him, could bring him, no refreshment.

After a few minutes Martin turned away. He went to the dressing-table, collected the razors and put them in a drawer. He looked about to see if there was any other thing that could be used as a weapon, but he could see none. He was perfectly aware within himself that all these precautions were now futile, that he need anticipate no further trouble; but he drove himself to the task deliberately, as some kind of discipline for his habit of taking things for granted.

When he returned to the fireside the time was a quarter-past four.

He settled himself down for another four hours' vigil. He felt sleepy now, but he was determined that he would not go to sleep. He sat upright and tried to fix his attention on Utopia; when his head drooped he rose and

took two or three quiet turns up and down the room. Once or twice he bathed his face in cold water.

At half-past seven he drew up the blind, but no glimmer of dawn had as yet relieved the blackness of the outside world. Only his own strained face stared back at him from behind the window glass.

At eight o'clock he softly unlocked the door and looked out. He could see no one but he heard the little noises of people moving about the house, the thud of Hester's footsteps in the passage below and the sound of Biddie's voice upstairs.

He came back into the bedroom and looked at Greg.

He was lying on his side, his back to the door, his right hand laid out on the counterpane.

Martin caught sight of some dark object pushing out from beneath the bolster. He leaned over quietly and drew out a travelling flask. It smelt strongly of whisky, but he found that it was now quite empty.

A few minutes later he heard someone knocking very softly, and he got up and quietly opened the door.

Margaret was standing outside. She looked at him with slightly raised eyebrows, silently expressing a question.

"I think he's asleep," said Martin in a low voice.

"Is it all right? Have you had any trouble?" she whispered.

"I don't know about its being all right," returned Martin, and then after a moment's hesitation, "No! I haven't had any trouble."

Margaret came noiselessly into the room and set down a medicine bottle on the table by the bed.

"It's the cure," she said. "I've mixed it according to the directions."

Martin nodded wearily, "Good," he said, "But I suppose we had better not wake him?"

She shook her head. "Do you mind staying here a few minutes longer?" she asked. "And then I'll come and take your place." She paused and then added, still

in the same furtive tone, "Has he been quite quiet all the time?"

"Oh! yes," said Martin, "quite." His new tenderness for that physically defeated antagonist on the bed completely over-rode his distaste for lying to Margaret.

"I'm so glad," she murmured as she left the room.

The first dull grey of the December morning was struggling with the yellow glare of the electric light; fading the darkness of the cast shadows, and here and there giving new form and substance to some object that had worn another semblance through the night.

Martin switched off the electric light, leaving the room in half darkness.

A faint murmur from the bed drew his attention.

"Do you want anything?" he asked.

Again the mumble was repeated, but he could not catch the words and went round to the other side of the bed to listen.

"Do you want anything, old chap?" he asked again.

Greg's eyelids fluttered. "Ye're a good fellow, Bond," he muttered. "I heard what ye said to Maggie."

Martin blushed. "Oh! that's all right," he said.

He believed that he knew now how this cure might be made a success.

XII. THE ALLIES.

I

WHEN he went to lie down at ten o'clock, Martin found that he was no longer sleepy; on the contrary he felt full of a tremendous energy. His mind glowed with enthusiasm. He had realized the force of Cecil Barker's suggestion that love was necessary if he wished truly to help his friend. Martin phrased it differently. His greatest latitude in speech would have amounted to no more than the statement that Greg was a "good chap," but he was conscious of a great difference within himself. All those objective judgments swinging continually between censure and approval had been merged into a single sensation. He no longer weighed or criticized; he was simply and unfeignedly glad. He was eager to take up again his treatment and care of Greg, to bring a new sympathy to his effort, to strengthen the understanding that he believed had been established. He regretted the eight or nine necessarily wasted hours that interposed between him and the renewal of his task.

In his thought of Greg, Martin was single-minded, but the thought of Margaret seemed to offer a strange, incomprehensible opposition. He was no longer working exclusively for her; indeed he saw that he could persist in his present effort with no failure of enthusiasm if she were absent. In some inexplicable way the confederacy between them had been broken. He had not told her of the events of the night, and had no intention of ever telling her. He had said nothing of that flask secreted under the pillow. He had gone over to the other side, and he had no sense of shame in the knowledge of his desertion; on the contrary he was warm with a feeling of loyalty for his new ally, as if he had but now wonderfully realized which sovereign he must serve.

His feeling for Margaret had suffered no change, but she stood, strangely, in a new relation. She occupied now the position that both himself and Greg had filled in turn, the position of the single party excluded from the confidence of the other two; and while she thus stood alone he could regard her with a new detachment.

The weight of the empty flask in his pocket recalled him to the necessity for carrying on his trust. He found a hiding place for that damning piece of evidence in his portmanteau.

Despite the sense of alertness—he never remembered his thought running so clear and clean as it did now—and his confidence that he had never been more wide awake, he undressed and went to bed. He might have a difficult and strenuous task before him during the second night of his watch.

When someone knocked at the door—a few minutes later as he confidently believed—he was astonished to find the room in darkness.

“Yes?” he asked.

The door was opened a few inches and Margaret’s voice said;

“Are you in bed? It’s seven o’clock. Robin’s asleep and Dr Forman has just come. I’m going down to see him before he goes up to Robin. Could you get up quickly, I want to see you while the doctor’s upstairs?”

“Oh! yes, rather. I’ll be down in ten minutes,” Martin replied.

He felt that a cold bath was a necessity, but he did not shave.

He met Margaret and Dr Forman on the stairs.

“Will you go into the drawing-room?” Margaret said. “I’ll be down in two minutes. You *have* had a sleep.”

Forman gave him a friendly nod.

2

Martin was intrigued by the thought of all that had been happening during those eight hours of unconsciousness. Why had the doctor been sent for? Had Greg broken out again; had he, perhaps, been violent? Yet Margaret had appeared quite cheerful. The change from morning to evening had been so tremendous. He had slept through the activities of a whole day. The fate of his little world might have been decided while he lay stupidly reckless of time.

Margaret did not keep him long in suspense.

She shut the door behind her when she came into the drawing-room, and instinctively lowered her voice.

"I think it's all right so far," she began. "He has been very quiet all day and hardly spoken a word, and he has been taking the cure. It made him most frightfully sick for the first few hours, but he seems better now. He didn't make the least fuss about taking it and I don't think he has drunk anything."

"You're not quite sure?" Martin interpolated.

"Yes! I think I am quite sure," she said. "I believe he's perfectly sober now, and—and rather ashamed of himself."

Martin looked down—they were sitting side by side on the little settee by the fireplace—the last sentence hurt him in some curious way.

"I'll go up when Forman's done," he said. "Why was he sent for?"

"Robin wanted him. He said his hand was very painful and he thought it ought to be seen to." She spoke quickly, always in that subdued voice; she seemed to have something urgent to say which she had not yet indicated.

"I'll go up directly," Martin repeated.

"You must have something to eat first," said Margaret. "It's all ready; but—I wanted to tell you—I've told Mr Forman about the cure."

"Oh! have you? Why?" asked Martin.

"He was bound to know. He said something about sending in some medicine to allay the fever, and I knew we couldn't give Robin anything else while he was taking the cure."

"What did Forman say?"

"He was quite nice about it—I like him—and he has promised not to let Robin guess that he knows anything about—about it all, you know. And we are just to throw away the medicine and pretend to Robin that we are deceiving Dr Forman."

So there was to be a new member of the conspiracy.

"I don't like it," said Martin.

"Why not?" she asked.

"Mr Greg would be very angry if he knew."

"Yes, of course he would, but he mustn't know."

"I don't like deceiving him, doing things behind his back!"

"Oh! but Dr Forman knew before we said a word."

"About the other thing, not about the cure."

"I can't see that *that* makes any difference."

Martin turned his face towards her and found that she was searching him with a look of anxious perplexity.

"It's this," he said. "We know that Mr Greg would not have liked us to tell Forman. We should be afraid to let him know now. I suppose it's because we have taken someone in from outside, isn't it?"

She turned her head away and dropped her eyes. "What happened last night?" she asked.

"Nothing," Martin said firmly.

"Something must have happened," she said. "Something tremendous, I should think, to have had so much effect upon you."

"I had twelve hours to think things over."

She stole a quick glance at him. "Did that make so much difference?" she asked.

"Why do you think there is any difference in me?" Martin wished that Forman would come down. This

interest in himself, this wonderful appreciation of his change of attitude was altogether too pleasant. He knew that she could do what she would with him. If she pressed him he might tell her all about last night, break confidence with Greg, and destroy, so he believed, all prospect of success.

"Really, there isn't any difference," he went on quickly. "But I *do* want this case to be a success, and I'm afraid of risking anything."

From upstairs came the sound of an opening door and of the doctor's voice on the landing.

"Of course you are," Margaret said. Her expression was more tender than Martin had ever seen it. She put out her hand and lightly touched his arm. "But you might trust me, I think," she added, and got up before he could answer.

3

"I don't think there is any serious trouble," was Forman's report. "The inflammation is still pretty bad, but we must expect that in his condition. Someone ought to sit up with him again. He's quite likely to be restless."

"Yes, I'm going to," Martin said.

"You had no trouble last night, I hear," said Forman.

"Oh! no—none," Martin returned coldly. He felt that Margaret was watching him.

"Will you go up now," she said, "and help him into a dressing gown? Hester and I are coming up to make his bed."

"Right," said Martin promptly. He was glad of an excuse to get away. Up there, alone with Greg, he would find again the peace of undivided desire. But presently, when the cure had succeeded, when the house had found a new unity, and the three of them were all of one party; then, perhaps, there might be some wonderful, almost

unhoped for reward awaiting him. She had asked him to trust her

Greg was sitting up in bed. He looked tired and ill.

"Here," he said, "just shut the door, will ye, and help me into my dressin'-gown. Ye'll find it in the wardrobe."

Martin was very tender of the wounded hand. "Don't put it through the sleeve," he said. "I'll just button the thing over your shoulders."

Greg hesitated. "I want ye to do something for me," he said.

"Well, rather, what is it?" said Martin. He felt a little embarrassed, a little like a young lover afraid of appearing too presumptuous.

"There are two—three flasks in the bed," said Greg nervously. "I could not find them myself. I've looked."

"I found one this morning," said Martin, "an empty one. I locked it up in my portmanteau."

"Och! did ye?" remarked Greg. "Did ye tell Maggie?"

Martin shook his head.

Greg stared at him intently for a moment, and then said, with a touch of grim humour, "Ah! weel, the one ye found was the one I've been searchin' high and low for. The other two are under the mattress. They're full. I could not get at them in the night, and I have not tried since." He waited a moment as if to let this promise of good behaviour penetrate Martin's understanding and then added, "Ye'll not tell Maggie?"

"Good God, no!" returned Martin with vigour.

He found the other two flasks with some little difficulty. They were, indeed, well buried under the heavy mattress.

While he searched, Greg sat huddled up in the arm-chair by the fire.

When Margaret and Hester came in to make the bed, Martin went into his own room and locked up the two flasks with the one he had found that morning.

4

On his return to the other room he found Greg back in bed, sitting up and taking a dose of the "cure."

"There are two more doses, Robin," Margaret said as he gave back the glass to her. "Mr Bond will give you the next at nine o'clock. He's going down to have supper, now. He has had nothing to eat since breakfast."

"It really doesn't matter. I'm not the least hungry," Martin muttered.

Greg lay back in bed and took no further notice of either of them.

He was still in the same position when Martin came up again after his hastily eaten supper.

Margaret was sitting in the arm-chair by the fire. She got up when Martin entered.

"Have you got anything to read?" she asked.

"Plenty," said Martin. "I didn't touch Podmore's *Owen* last night."

"But you must have read a lot in all that time?" she remarked carelessly.

Martin picked up the two volumes of *Das Kapital*. "There's some pretty solid stuff in here," he said.

She looked at the books as if they did not interest her, and nodded. "Nothing else you want, then?" she asked.

"No, nothing else, thanks," Martin answered.

But as she was leaving the room, Greg opened his eyes and said, "Forman was sayin' something about sendin' me in some medicine to rejuice the inflammation. What'll ye do with it?"

Martin turned his back and looked down at the fender. He was determined to have no part in this play.

"Oh! we can easily throw it away," Margaret said.

"He'll be comin' in again to-morrow," Greg returned, "and he'll be sure to look for it."

"Well, we'll pour some of it away and put the bottle

back on your table," was Margaret's reply. She spoke with a touch of gaiety. Her manner towards him was not that she usually displayed. She was less nervous, she seemed more inclined to regard him as a child that must be humoured.

"Didn't Forman see the other bottle on the table?" Martin asked suddenly, from the hearthrug.

"No, I put it away," said Margaret.

Greg had closed his eyes again and did not reply when Margaret wished him "good night."

And he did not speak again until Martin gave him another dose of the "cure" at nine o'clock. Then as he lay back in bed he said, "I'll maybe sleep now. There's no reason why ye should stay with me. There's nothing in the room but maybe a few empty bottles."

"Oh! well, let me stay, old chap," said Martin, and as Greg made no reply he added, "It's frightfully hot in here. Do you mind if I open the window a bit?"

"Please yourself," muttered Greg.

The night passed without any startling incident.

About twelve o'clock Greg began to toss uneasily, mumbling to himself, and throwing his arms out of bed; and for three hours afterwards he was increasingly restless, once or twice he sat up with a violent shout and stared uncomprehendingly at Martin watching him from the foot of the bed.

But soon after three o'clock he seemed to fall into a more restful sleep, his breathing was easier and his whole body more relaxed.

Martin had finished his *Utopia* and the two volumes of Podmore's *Owen* when Margaret came in at half-past seven bringing the second bottle of the cure.

This time Martin could have said without any hesitation that Greg had most certainly found no hidden supply of whisky in the night.

He wondered if the cure were beginning to take effect.

5

He undressed and went to bed after he had had breakfast, but he lay open-eyed with no inclination to rest, and at half-past two he gave up all hope of going to sleep. Margaret doubtless heard him go to the bathroom, for when he came out of his room she quietly opened Greg's door.

"Couldn't you sleep?" she asked in a whisper.

Martin shook his head. "Not a wink," he said. "I don't know why. I just didn't and couldn't feel sleepy."

"Robin wants to see you," Margaret said. She came out on to the landing and closed the door behind her. "He's very quiet, now. Could you come in later? Are you going out?"

"Yes, I want a little exercise." He looked at her and then at the door of Greg's room, raising his eyebrows, silently asking what was for them the only important question.

"Perfectly," said Margaret. "He has certainly had nothing since Saturday night. Will you see him when you come back, then?"

"Yes, all right, I will," said Martin.

"Tell Hester to get you some tea," she advised him as he went downstairs.

This must be some further confidence that Greg wanted to make, Martin thought as he plodded through the fine December rain; possibly there was another cache of whisky somewhere in the bedroom. But if there were, the declaration of it would be a splendid sign of an earnest intention to reform. Nevertheless he wished that the confession could have been made to Margaret. He did not like this exclusion of her; it put so much responsibility upon himself, and while he was willing enough to shoulder it, he had begun to doubt whether he was competent. He was ready enough now to admit that he was no match for Greg in any contest

of wits, and he feared any division that would rob him of Margaret's experience and intuitions. Also, he disliked the thought that he and she, who were fighting for the same object, should be in some sense opposed to each other. It was so essential that a perfect confidence should be established between them, and yet how could he fail now in loyalty to Greg? That, surely, would undo all the good that had been already done, and till now everything appeared to be going so well.

Martin could see no way out of the difficulty.

When he came into Greg's room at five o'clock, Margaret got up and left them.

"Well, how's the hand?" asked Martin with an affectation of cheeriness.

Greg did not reply. He looked more ill than Martin had yet seen him, drawn and grey, and unutterably weary; he lay on his back with his hands stretched out on the counterpane, and when he opened his eyes he stared straight up at the ceiling.

"D'ye know how long this sickness is likely to last?" he asked, after a long pause. "I've been very sick again to-day. It must be some drug they put in the medicine."

Martin did not know. "It may be only in the first two bottles," he ventured, trying to assume a cheerful confidence. "I could find out, of course."

"I'll give it another trial to-morrow, any way," said Greg, "but I'll take no more to-night. I'm worn out." He paused again, and then went on, "However, that's not what I wanted to see ye about. I don't wish ye to sit up with me to-night."

"Oh! but I don't mind a bit . . ." began Martin.

"It's not what *you* mind, but what *I* mind," interrupted Greg. "If ye're going to do me any good at all, ye've got to trust me."

"Of course, I know. I quite understand that," said Martin. "It's only for the first day or two . . ."

"Ye've sat up with me two nights already."

"Well, let me stay one more."

"Ye can search the room," said Greg, "and the house. I lied to ye last night when I said there was none in the room." He evidently had a strange disinclination to name the thing that had been destroying him. "The two bottles of hairwash on the dressin'-table are nearly full and there's another bottle in the dressin' case under the portmanteaux on top of the wardrobe. That's all. I'm tellin' ye the truth, now."

Martin looked his perplexity. How could he know that this was all? The man was so clever. This extraordinary confidence might be another blind.

Greg moved uneasily and turned his face for the first time towards Martin. "It's small wonder that ye doubt me," he said, "but I'm tellin' ye the truth. Ye must try and trust me."

"Oh, so I do, at least, so I will after to-night," stammered Martin. "But I can't see why you shouldn't let me stay just once more."

"It goes against me to be treated that way," said Greg. "I've been thinkin' of it all the time I've been lying here. Ye're too young and ye don't understand, but I've allowed ye to be here, ye and Maggie, for forty-eight hours and that should be enough to show ye that I'm in earnest."

"I could have tricked ye both, any time, if I'd had a mind to," he added.

"Has Miss Hamilton agreed to—to this?" asked Martin, clinging to a last hope.

"Ye can discuss it with her," Greg answered, after a thoughtful interval. He turned on his back again, and stared up at the ceiling. "Ye've told her nothing about last night or the night before?" he asked.

"Nothing, not a word," said Martin.

"Well, I'd sooner ye didn't," said Greg, "and ye might take away what I've just told ye about, and keep a quiet tongue about that, too."

"Very well," Martin acquiesced.

"But when ye've done that," Greg continued, "ye

can discuss with her the point I've just indicated, and I'll advise ye that ye'd be better guided to trust me."

"Very well," Martin agreed, rather sadly.

He got up on a chair and dragged out the suit case, finding the key, by Greg's instruction, in the pocket of an old waistcoat that hung in the wardrobe.

"Lock it and put it back," mumbled Greg, when Martin had taken out an unopened bottle of whisky, "the key's supposed to have been lost."

After that Martin made exploration, guided by his sense of smell, among a dozen or more bottles on the dressing-table and wash-stand, but he found, as Greg had said, that only two of them contained whisky.

He then went quietly into his own room and added these finds to his own collection. It struck him that he would not like Hester to discover all this secret supply of alcohol, and he separated the key of his portmanteau from the others on the ring and put it in his watch-pocket.

"There's nothing else I can do, I suppose?" he asked, when he had returned.

Greg shook his head weakly. "Ye can tell Maggie that she may search the room," he said as an after-thought.

6

Margaret was on the landing when Martin came out. She had evidently been waiting in her own bedroom. She looked at him with that mute interrogation which now had but one significance.

Instead of returning the usual affirmative signal, Martin closed the door of Greg's room behind him.

"I want to talk to you for a few minutes, please," he said. She answered him by a glance at the closed door that said quite plainly, "Can we leave him alone?"

Martin nodded confidently, but she still hesitated, searching his face with a look full of doubt.

He smiled a little uneasily. "We must have a talk," he said. "He has asked me to do, at least not to do, something."

They went as usual to the bleak, extraordinarily empty drawing-room.

"It's this," said Martin at once; "he has asked me not to sit up with him to-night. He has insisted that we must trust him. He says we may search the room and the house if we like. I really think it's safe."

Margaret did not answer him immediately. She put both hands up to her face and leaned forward, her elbows on her knees.

"He's tricking us again," she said at last, "it's only another failure."

Martin had a momentary inspiration. "Does your intuition tell you that?" he asked.

She shook her head and sat up. "I seem to have lost all my intuitions where Robin is concerned," she said. "I don't know why, I can't explain. He holds me off so, I can't get near him. But oh! it's quite certain that he's fooling us somehow. I've been through it all before. I know the signs so well." She sighed with a deep quick inhalation, as if she were gasping for breath, and put her hands to her face again.

Her weakness gave Martin strength. "I know you don't trust any intuition of mine," he said, "you don't think I ever have any, and I don't know that I ever have before; but somehow, I do really feel now that he is playing straight with us. I seem to have got into touch with him during the past two days. I feel quite differently about him, now." He stopped and looked down at the floor, and he blushed and stammered as he continued, "I told you, didn't I, that Mr Barker said I shouldn't do any good with him unless I . . . 'I loved him,' was what Mr Barker said. And I daresay it may sound awfully . . . rather . . . rather silly, perhaps, to you, but in these last two days, I have . . . at least . . . in a way, you know . . . I mean I do care tremendously

whether this cure's going to be a success or not. I know I'm a silly ass and all that, but I do believe we ought to trust him now. It's . . . it's my first intuition."

Margaret's eyes were full of tears. If her intuitions had failed her where Robin was concerned, they were growing daily stronger in relation to Martin; and it seemed to her that this stammering confession of his, so utterly devoid as it was of any sentimental emotion, had given her sight of something fine and sacred, some splendid aspect of love that she had never before understood. If Robin reciprocated Martin's feeling for him, she could not doubt that the cure would be a success.

"You're bigger than I am," she said, after a long pause.

"Oh! no, no," said Martin earnestly. "You'll make me feel absolutely beastly if you talk like that. It isn't that at all. I'm not anything like . . ." He couldn't finish his sentence. He got up and stood before the desolate grate, his hands in his coat pockets, his whole attention given apparently to the pattern of the hearthrug.

"It isn't that at all," he repeated. "It's just whether you can trust me . . . and him."

"I can trust *you*," she said, and then, watching his embarrassment, she went on. "And I daresay you're right. Let's try it."

"I believe it's the best thing to do," he said, without looking up.

But Margaret could not leave the situation without one more attempt to solve the private problem that had been intriguing her.

"I suppose he has been confiding in you?" she asked.

He looked up then and met her regard of him. "You've said you trusted me," was the defence he tried to interpose between them.

"But you can't trust me." It was she, now, who looked down.

"I can," he said awkwardly. He would have given

everything he had to be able to kneel by her and tell her that he would trust her with his whole life, but he could not be false to the man upstairs.

"Well, *he* can't trust me, then," she said.

"He can," muttered Martin. "And he will, very soon. It's only just at first. Presently, when he's a bit better

"It must have been something very important," said Margaret, interrupting his half-inaudible mutterings.

"Not particularly," he said; "really it wasn't."

She got up with a little sign of impatience. "Oh! well," she said, "we've agreed to trust him and that's all that matters. So you need not sit up to-night. That must be rather a relief to you?"

"It isn't; not a bit," he returned. "Are you going to search the room?"

"Oh! no, what's the good?" she said, and shrugged her shoulders. "He knows he's safe. If there's any whisky there, we shan't find it."

"I say, you're not angry with me?" asked Martin, looking up at her beseechingly.

She gave him a bleak, formal smile, that reminded him of her sister's photograph. "Angry? Of course I'm not," she said lightly. "Why should I be angry with you?"

"I don't know," he said miserably.

"I'd better go back to Robin," she said with a little laugh, and went out.

Martin should have been elated, but he was profoundly dejected and miserable. It seemed to him that there was nothing in the world worth living for. Even the cure of Greg had, in some curious way, lost a little of its splendour. For a time he stared absorbedly at Margaret's photograph, and then, very humbly and reverently, he kissed the pictured semblance of her hair.

At half-past eight he went up to help Greg into his dressing-gown so that he might get up while his bed was being made.

He had been asleep for two hours and although his face still looked drawn and grey, he seemed to have lost a little of the weariness that had been so apparent earlier in the day.

He did not speak, however, while he was being helped into the arm-chair by the fire—plainly he was extraordinarily pulled down and weak—but he held up his hand when Martin was about to call in Margaret and Hester, and said,

“Just a minute.”

Martin thought that some further confession was coming, and a flash of alarm shot through him.

“I just want to say that—I’m vairy grateful to ye, Bond,” said Greg.

“Oh, for Heaven’s sake don’t talk rot,” returned Martin, flushing.

A flicker of a smile lighted Greg’s face for a moment.

“Ye’re not so polite as ye were,” he said.

“I know you better,” said Martin.

“And I don’t think that ye like me any worse, if that were possible,” said Greg, silyly.

“No, I don’t know that I do,” said Martin. “Well, good night, old man.”

“Good night, laddie,” replied Greg, without looking up.

XIII. CONFEDERATION.

I

AFTER that brief expression of gratitude, Robin Greg made no further reference to the great object that was engaging all the energies of his secretary and sister-in-law. The sickness did not recur after the second day, and his appetite began slowly to return, but he gave no confidences about his condition. For the most part he lay quite still, gazing up at the ceiling. His attitude and expression seemed to denote an abstraction from the affairs of every day; he may have been courageously reckoning his past or seeking to read the future. Whatever the subject of his secret thought he gave no trouble. He took the "cure" with perfect regularity and readiness. Indeed, he seemed eager for it. After the second day not a single dose of the diluted drug was wasted.

Dr Forman's diagnosis was not particularly enlightening. "He's going on all right," was the only essential. "The cut's healing very slowly, bound to, but there are no complications." He seemed keenly interested in the "Antol" cure, however, asked many questions and took home a small sample for private analysis. "I'm not very keen on these things as a rule," he explained, "but this stuff's certainly having some effect. You've had no trouble at all, have you? He's never tried to get at any whisky since you started?"

"No," said Martin, "not once since we started." That was a whole truth he was always glad to state.

Margaret suggested that perhaps Robin was too ill to care. She still clung a little fondly to that theory of illness.

Forman pulled his moustache. "But, in a sense, you know, he isn't ill at all," he said. "There's no organic

trouble and no fever, now. He's very weak, of course, and no doubt a good deal upset inside, but now that he's taking solid food again regularly, that'll soon get all right."

That appeared to be the note that must be adopted with confidence, and Martin, at least, sounded it on every possible occasion.

He saw comparatively little of Margaret after that determining conversation in the drawing-room. During the first week of the cure, although the night watch had been definitely abandoned, one or other of them was in Greg's room throughout the day. If any excuse had been needed, it could have been urged that they were nursing him, treating him as an ordinary invalid, but he seemed in no way to resent their presence.

And when Martin and Margaret found themselves alone together for a few moments, no further confidences passed between them. She had apparently given up any attempt to discover what had happened on that first Saturday night and the following Sunday; she seemed to rely more upon Martin's strength, to give greater consideration to his opinion; but she wore as yet no air of certain hope for the future, and there was a new reserve in her manner that Martin could not understand.

2

Both Margaret's reserve and Greg's long silence were broken on Sunday, the eighth day of the cure. Greg was undoubtedly better that morning. He had asked for his dressing-gown and he was sitting up in bed reading a novel.

At half-past eleven both he and Martin, who was reading Socialism by the fire, heard a knock at the front door, and a few moments later the voice of Dr Forman in the hall below.

Martin got out of his chair. "That's Forman," he

remarked, and taking up a medicine bottle from the wash-stand, he poured away a few doses from it, and substituted it for the bottle of the cure that stood on the table by the bed.

Greg smiled grimly, and Martin, taking this unusual sign as an encouragement, grinned and said, "Usual game."

"Has he never asked ye any questions about me?" asked Greg.

"Never," returned Martin.

"D'ye suppose he thinks I'm taking his medicine all the time?"

"Well, of course."

"I should not have taken it in any case," said Greg.

"I'm a homœopathist; but I thought it was better not to make a fuss in the circumstances. However, he'll not be comin' many times more. There's no need for him, now; he'll just be runnin' up a bill, that's all. Not but what he's a good enough fellow in a way."

"Oh! rather; he's all right," agreed Martin. He was a little nervous on this dangerous ground.

"Are ye sure he's not suspicious?" asked Greg keenly, returning to the main issue.

"He has never shown any sign of it with me," replied Martin sturdily.

"D'ye *always* talk about football?" Greg's tone implied that such foolishness was beyond his comprehension, but his smile was friendly.

"Well, you see, it's the thick of the Rugby season," explained Martin, "and we're both rather keen on the form of the XV's for the 'Varsity match next Saturday." He paused for a moment and then added, "We both think it's rather a good thing for Cambridge."

"And since when has Maggie been so interested in football?" asked Greg cynically.

"I've never mentioned football to Miss Hamilton." Martin, with his boy's ingenuousness, was too anxious to hide his own feeling.

Greg noted the readiness of his reply and his underlip shot out. "Och! who's talkin' about you?" he said.

"I thought . . ." began Martin.

"I saw ye did," Greg interrupted him. "But what I want to know is what Maggie finds to talk about to Forman in the drawing-room whenever he comes? He's been here ten minutes, now, and if he's not fetched it'll quite likely be a half-hour or more before he comes upstairs."

He had been watching them, then, noticing everything, drawing inferences during all the time that he had lain so quietly, so apparently unconscious of the world about him. The thought came to Martin with something of reproof; he was afraid that he had begun to grow careless again, to treat this wonderful complex on the bed as a mere patient to be commanded or humoured for his own good.

"What a suspicious old beggar you are," he said, trying to find a way out of his dilemma.

Greg did not respond to the playful tone of that remark. He looked moody and thoughtful. "Maggie's keepin' something from me," he said. "I think ye've been honest, but I'm not so sure about Maggie."

Martin shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps we've kept too much from *her*," he suggested.

Greg looked at him sharply. "But she would not guess that," he said.

"She does," said Martin.

"How?" Greg snapped at him.

"She asked me questions about that Saturday night," said Martin, "and when I said you had been quiet, she didn't believe me. I haven't told her anything, but I know she feels that she is being kept out of it, in a way, if you know what I mean. I think we ought to tell her."

Greg lay back in bed and looked up at the ceiling. "Maybe ye're right," he said after a pause. "I'll tell her, myself, when Forman's gone. We'll have no more of this underhand business." He stopped, and then sat up

and said with a sudden spurt of temper, " But I wish ye'd go and send that doctor fellow up, sharp, Bond. What the devil those two have been haverin' about the last half-hour is clean beyond me. I tell ye I don't like it."

" I'll go," said Martin.

3

He was very conscious that he did not like it himself. He had a strange feeling to which he hardly, as yet, could have given the name of jealousy. As he saw it, Margaret was becoming too intimate with this fourth person from the outside; she was giving him the confidence that should have been reserved for himself who had borne the brunt of all that was unpleasant at the beginning of this cure they were trying to effect. And he thought that Greg probably had much the same feeling although in his case it was no more than an unsupported suspicion. After all, Forman was a mere puppet in this affair . . .

Martin's perturbation was in no way smoothed by the sight of Forman and Margaret. They were coming out of the drawing-room as he reached the hall; they were laughing and appeared to be on the best of terms with one another.

" Hallo!" said Forman gaily. " How's the patient?"

" A bit ratty," returned Martin, without a smile.

" He heard you come half an hour ago and he has been wondering why you don't go up."

" Suspicious?" asked Forman cheerfully.

" Well, naturally," said Martin. " Of course *he* thinks you've been discussing *him* all the time. And if he once guesses that you know anything . . ." He shrugged his shoulders.

Forman's hand went to his moustache. " Is it as bad as that?" he asked more seriously.

"Quite," said Martin, caustically.

Forman looked a trifle put out. "Oh! well," he began; but Margaret stepped in quickly by saying,

"Perhaps you had better go up now. It's quite true that he is rather difficult to deal with in some ways; and it certainly would not do, just now, for him to know that we had told you."

"Certainly. Oh! yes, I understand, Miss Hamilton," replied Forman, quite friendly at once. As he passed Martin he said, "I'll put him off the scent all right, there's no need for you to get upset."

Martin made no answer until the doctor had entered Greg's room and shut the door, then he looked solemnly at Margaret and said, "It will take a cleverer man than Dr Forman to fool Mr Grèg."

"So you've found that out, have you?" she returned coolly.

"Some time ago," said Martin. "Do you mind going back into the drawing-room for a minute, I want to tell you something?"

"What is it?" she asked when they were alone in that bleak room with the door shut between them and the rest of the house. She looked at him inquiringly. She had read clearly enough his mood in the hall, and it had not displeased her, but she saw that he had something to tell her that had nothing to do with his boyish jealousy.

"He's been talking to me," said Martin. He felt horribly estranged from her. He wanted to plead for a general re-establishment of confidence among the three of them, but he could not rid himself of the thought of that unnecessary, intruding fourth person, with his blonde handsome face and square shoulders.

"What did he say?" asked Margaret as Martin paused.

"He said that you had been keeping something from him," he said, and then, unable to keep Forman out of it, he went on, "He asked me what on earth you and the

doctor fellow found to talk about for half an hour whenever he comes. And *I* couldn't tell him."

Margaret smiled. "Was that all?" she asked.

"No," said Martin gloomily. "I told him I didn't know whether you were keeping anything from him, but that if you were it was only natural, because he'd made me keep something back from you. And then he said I was quite right, and that he'd tell you after that chap upstairs had gone."

"I thought you liked Dr Forman," Margaret replied most inconsequently.

"Oh! he's all right," said Martin. "I don't see what he's got to do with it. Three is enough, surely."

"Three has been one too many up till now," she said, quietly.

"You don't mean to say that you've lost heart in it?" asked Martin anxiously. "Not now that everything's going so well?"

"Oh! no," She shook her head and sat down on the little settee by the fireplace. "Oh! no," she repeated, "I could never do that. You don't understand how much it means to me."

Martin fidgeted. "I think I understand that," he said in a low voice. "What I don't understand . . ."

"Oh! naturally," she said with a touch of impatience. "How should you?"

Martin looked distressed, but could find nothing to say.

"What is it he's going to tell me?" she asked.

"Oh! please don't ask me," pleaded Martin. "He's going to tell you himself, and after that I hope it will all be straight sailing, again. If you knew how *I* hate all these reserves . . ."

"Not more than I do," remarked Margaret.

"I don't know the least bit what I've done to put you out," he said. "I don't see . . ."

Everything looked so different from this point of view. They had begun to work together and how could

he explain the reason for his failure to give her that perfect confidence which could—so it seemed now—have been the only possible ground of their endeavour.

She did not help him. "I've done all I could," she said, with her face turned away from him, "but I feel that you've tried to keep me out of it."

"I?" he asked in amazement.

"Well, you and Robin between you," she said.

"But . . ." he began, and then, "Indeed and indeed we haven't, at least *I* certainly haven't; but isn't it going to be all right, now? I've said that he's going to tell you everything at once; I asked him to. Don't you understand how I *want* to work with you—and him?"

"I suppose it was only some silly bottles he had hidden?" said Margaret.

"He'll tell you," returned Martin. "Here's Forman! Will you go up now! I'll let him out."

Margaret laughed most unexpectedly. "Oh! poor Dr Forman," she remarked as she left the room.

4

After he had seen Forman out—they talked no football that morning—Martin went into the study and tried to read, but his mind refused to consider any subject but the interview that was taking place in the room overhead.

He heard the mumble of Greg's voice disconnectedly, a broken mutter of sound, without any dramatic quality, that conveyed no impression of the scene that was acting—he might have been learning verse by heart like a schoolboy, repeating the lines aloud. The intervals might or might not have been filled by Margaret's answers. If she spoke her voice was so low that it did not reach the study.

Martin listened more attentively.

The intermittent mumbling continued perplexingly

until, without any prelude of raised voices, a chair—Margaret's chair it must have been—was pushed back so suddenly that it fell over; the rap of it on the polished boards by the door came out flat and clear. After that he heard footsteps walking up and down and then for the first time the sound of Margaret's voice.

She was speaking quickly, a little excitedly, it seemed. Sometimes she stopped for a moment in her pacing of the room, and then the sound of her voice dropped to a lower, almost inaudible pitch. Once or twice Martin thought he could pick out an isolated word or two here and there, something that sounded like "I know," and a little later, "I'm not *blind*."

Martin frowned. He was utterly puzzled.

Presently the mumble began afresh, intermittently as before, but this time with something more of urgency. The footsteps had ceased; either she must be standing still or she had sat down again.

Martin had pictured some moving scene, but he was lost now; all the little conjunctive sounds of response or acquiescence failed to reach him. He could not tell whether she was agreeing with or dissenting from the statements—if they were statements—of that monotonous, dull voice.

He looked at his watch and found that it was nearly one o'clock. Margaret had been up there over half an hour. He jumped to his feet suddenly as he heard the door above opened, but Margaret did not come downstairs, she went into her own room.

He fidgeted, wondering whether he should go up to Greg. Something of the old sense of being excluded had returned to him. After all those inferred confessions and understandings, he thought that it might seem like curiosity if he went up too quickly, as if he were anxious to assert his consequence in all that went forward.

Would it never be possible for the three of them to be in accord?

The house was very quiet now. The only sound was

the thud of Hester's footsteps going backwards and forwards through the hall as she laid the dinner.

Margaret must come down then, he reflected; only, of course, there would be Biddie.

5

Biddie, however, did not come down to dinner. She had been rather naughty, Margaret said, and was being punished by detention in the nursery; she was to be taken presently to her father's room. This was the first time in eight days that Greg had asked for her.

Martin thought that Margaret looked as if she had been crying. She gave him no encouragement to talk at first, and he was shy of opening any topic; he was anxious not to appear curious as to the details of the interview she had had upstairs with Greg; indeed, he was slightly over-anxious to show his perfect unconcern.

It was not until they were half-way through dinner that Margaret suddenly opened the conversation by saying:

"Well? Don't you want to know what Robin told me?"

"I suppose I know," said Martin.

"Oh! that!" she said. "That was nothing! Not the facts, I mean, his trying to cut your throat and hiding the bottles."

"What else was there?" asked Martin in perplexity. Facts meant so much to him.

She made a little grimace and bent down over her plate.

"L-lots of things," she said with her little trick of hesitation.

Martin remembered that he had not noticed that charming stammer of hers for several days.

"Things that weren't 'facts'?" he asked.

"The things that count," she said, and then she sat up

and gripped the arms of her "carving" chair. "The real great things," she went on slowly, looking straight out in front of her. "I've been so small and mean to—to you both."

"Oh! *no!*" Martin broke out eagerly. "You've done everything. He would never have taken any notice of me."

"He's been splendid," she said, and then she suddenly began to fumble for her handkerchief, and got up and went over to the window.

Martin pushed his chair back and stared miserably at his half-empty plate. He did not know what to do or say; he only knew that to eat was an impossible *gaucherie* in such a situation. She relieved him of his embarrassment by coming back to the table. "I *am* a fool," she remarked with a smile. "*Do* go on with your dinner."

"I don't think I want any more," he said awkwardly.

"Well, you might ring," suggested Margaret. "I expect Hester wants hers."

She had control of herself again by the time Hester had put the pudding on the table; but Martin wished that they were alone in the drawing-room. He felt more at home with her there; these banalities of serving and eating food seemed so utterly out of place. And, indeed, it was not until Hester had been in again and left them to face the cheese neither of them wished to eat, that Margaret returned to the one important topic.

"I won't be silly any more," she said, putting her elbows on the table and leaning her chin on her hands, "but I do want to begin again all clear from to-day with no more misunderstandings."

"Yes, rather," assented Martin shyly.

"Robin was so splendid, just now," she continued, "so like his old self. He does understand so well, when he likes. And, perhaps you don't realize how difficult it must have been for him to tell me all about Saturday night. I don't suppose anything could have been harder

for him than that. It's just the one subject he never will talk about to anyone; and even now, when he is making a big effort, it's just the one thing in the world he'd rather not speak about."

"I know," agreed Martin.

"And he was so quiet about it all," she went on, "although he hurt me terribly. He said"—her voice trembled slightly and she dug her knuckles into her chin and paused a moment—"he said that you had trusted him and I hadn't, that I had never trusted him. I got up and knocked my chair over when he said that; did you hear it?"

Martin nodded. The details of that scene were becoming marvellously clear now.

"And then, when I protested—Oh! yes, I did protest—he just convinced me in his quiet way that he understood all about it, and told me not to fash myself any more, now that we understood one another. He said it was all coming right and that we must try to have more confidence in one another. He made me cry, I felt that I had been so horrible."

Martin was watching her face intently, but she did not appear to see him. There had been a great deal of Robin Greg in all she had said, but little of Martin Bond. He wondered if this were to be the final bouleversement; if he were to end as he had begun as the outsider, the tool that had been picked up by chance to serve some necessary purpose and was soon to become useless? He felt, in some inexplicable way, as if he had now lost touch with both Greg and Margaret.

She was, perhaps, too exalted just then to sympathize with Martin's depression; her mood was too active to be haled back by any small conflict of temperament; but beyond this there was something of a definite purpose in her mind. She had been praised and encouraged by Robin, made to feel that it was her influence which had stimulated all his endeavours, and with a natural reaction she had realized that it was to Robin and not to

Martin that she owed all she had to give of encouragement and assistance. Martin had a strength and independence that made no call upon her at this moment.

"So now we are all to work together?" he asked after a long interval of silence.

She leaned back in her chair and looked at him half-absently. "Yes, we are not nearly out of the wood yet," she said. "What he wants now is our sympathy more than anything."

"Hasn't he always had that?" he suggested.

"In a way," she agreed.

"Mine, he has, in any case," he said, with a slightly surly qualification.

"Oh! you've been wonderful," said Margaret lightly.

Martin shrugged his shoulders and looked past her out of the window. He seemed to be walking out of that fascinatingly dangerous country he had once feared to explore, into a dull, commonplace world devoid of any possible interest.

"I'm not sure that we give the 'Antol' stuff itself all the credit it deserves," he remarked. "I doubt if we should have got as far as this without it. As Forman noticed, you remember, Mr Greg has been extraordinarily free from the craving one would have expected. That must be due to the drug, whatever it is. He's been poisoned, consistently, for two years, and in the ordinary way he must have suffered, physically, ever so much more than he has. We seem only to have had to fight the mental side of him."

"Oh! yes, I know," Margaret admitted. "The 'cure' has helped us marvellously. Only the time will come when we can't depend on that any longer—in another fortnight, to be precise."

"By that time you'll be able to manage him alone," said Martin tentatively.

She looked at him quickly.

"What about the book, then?" she asked.

"I'm not the only secretary to be had," he said, and added, "Nor by any means the best." He was trying desperately to get some word from her that would carry him through the rest of the day—most of it, as he guessed rightly enough, to be spent alone in the study.

"You'll have to talk to Robin about that," she said with a smile, and Martin caught a glimpse of the chains that were forged about him.

XIV. THE WORLD OUTSIDE.

I

THE knowledge of those chains became a thing too familiar to need remark in the course of the next few days.

On Monday, the ninth day of the "cure," Greg came down to the study for a couple of hours in the afternoon. He wore his dressing-gown and bedroom slippers, but he had washed, shaved and brushed his hair; he was a perfectly respectable invalid, not the figure of disgust that had invaded the same room a fortnight before.

Biddie came in to tea, bright and inclined to be impertinent, but her father, although he nursed her and talked to her for a time, exhibited none of that maudlin fondness and sentimentality he had shown on an earlier occasion. Biddie on her side evidently appreciated the change of manner, and missing the thing which in all probability she disliked when it was plainly in evidence, she was feminine enough to try to evoke it anew. "I love Aunt Marg'et, and Nanna and Uncoo Martin and . . . and Dadda," was the form her challenge took, and when her father failed to criticize his place in the list, she brought out another piece from her repertoire by adding, "But I love Dadda best," and clung round his neck, covering him with obviously moist kisses.

"Och! Biddie, don't worry," was all the result she achieved, and she was presently sent upstairs, rather puzzled and resentful, to devise, perhaps, further plans for her father's subjugation. In her little experience of three and a half years she could not remember so detached a father. Hitherto, he had been either too rough or too fond.

When she had gone, Greg introduced at once the

subject of "The book"; not as previously, with an effort of concentration that soon lagged, but with a certain gusto and interest, a plain intention of getting the work finished as soon as possible.

"I'll not be able to get back to the office until after this Christmas that ye make so much fuss about in England," he said, "so I'll have a clear two weeks or more to get the thing fairly started." And when he heard that Martin had already made a beginning with his history of Socialism in three chapters, he insisted that the manuscript should be brought out and read aloud.

Martin was not at all unwilling. He had read papers too often at Cambridge to feel any nervousness, and he was secretly satisfied with the few pages he had written.

His little audience of two listened attentively, and when he had finished, Margaret cheered him by saying,

"I think that's a splendid beginning. It's all so clear, and so interesting too."

"Yes," agreed Greg, "it's very good. Ye express yerself well, laddie, it's concise and apt . . ."

"But . . . ?" queried Martin, waiting for the certain qualification that was implied by the other's tone.

"Well, it's not precisely a 'but' either," said Greg good-humouredly. "All ye've written can very well stand. I was only thinking that I'd like ye to begin a little further back. I know well enough that what we mean by 'Socialism' now, began in a way, as ye say quite truly, at the end of the eighteenth century. But I'd like ye to show, if possible, how the idea's a while older than that. I don't want ye to drag in Plato and Aristotle or Sir Thomas More, and the whole palaver about Utopia—that's all been done; but I'd like ye to show how the thing's been expressed in action of a kind. Now, there's the Incas of Peru that had a social system that was very like a form of Socialism, and I'd like ye to look up the Levellers and the Digger movement in the time of Cromwell; I think ye'll find some interestin'

material there that'll be more or less new in this connexion. If ye follow me, I'd like for us just to point out that the tendency is as old as the hills, the tendency towards some form of communism, I mean. If we're successfully to attack the present form of Evolutionary Socialism that's to come through Syndicalism, we'll do better to begin by provin' that we're dealin' with a root principle of human nature and not with a modern remedy arisin' out of present conditions."

"Oh! yes, I see," agreed Martin. "I hadn't, of course, realized your general attitude."

"Ye're all right," said Greg, "and what ye've done'll be very useful, but we'll get down to the general scheme to-morrow—I'm a wee bit tired to-night—and we'll have the best part of the book written in the next fortnight."

He was full of enthusiasm and talked for another half-hour before he went upstairs.

Martin saw very clearly that he would have to remain at Garroch until the book was finished; the prospect seemed in no way unpleasant, now.

2

He was summoned to Greg's room at half-past nine the next morning and found his employer sitting up in bed wrapped in a dressing-gown.

He was looking worried and anxious. He had a litter of opened letters lying on the counterpane in front of him; the envelopes, untidily burst open, had been thrown on the floor.

"I would like ye to take down a few letters, Bond," he said. "I've been leavin' all this stuff until I felt better able to deal with it; and I don't know that I would have tackled it this morning if I hadn't had another letter from Andrews." He frowned and stared past Martin at the wardrobe. "The man's a fule," he remarked, with damning deliberation.

"I'd better get some note paper," said Martin.

Greg nodded. "There'll be a pad on the desk downstairs," he said.

"First of all," Greg began, when Martin returned, "will ye write to Andrews and say that I'll not be back in the City till after Christmas? Thank him for his kind inquiries in this and his previous letter of last Thursday, which I only opened this morning, and ask him to send my clerk down here to-morrow first thing. He lives this way, but he'll have to go to the office to get my post."

He dictated half a dozen other letters in the same general way to various business correspondents, and then, after a long hesitation, a letter to Rotterdam which he phrased with great care, framing each sentence with precision.

When it was done he stretched out his hand for the pad. "Here, let me have a look at it," he said, and after weighing the matter of the letter, he asked for Martin's fountain pen, and began to make corrections, chuckling once or twice as at the effect of his own cleverness.

The matter of the letter, so far as Martin could understand it, had reference to the underwriting of some new company. "He'll not get too much information out of that," said Greg when he had finished, "but I think it has the look of a simple, straightforward business letter, eh?" And on receiving Martin's expression of accordant opinion, he gave a little hooting laugh.

There was, however, a curious change now in the quality of that laugh of his. While it was still a "hoot," and could be described in no other way, much of the malice had gone from it, the bitterness of the irony had given place to a kinder humour which, although definitely satirical, did not carry the same suggestion of insult.

"Ye write a nice clear hand," he remarked as he gave back the pad to Martin. "If ye'll just get these done,"

he added, "I'll sign 'em and then I'll get up and we'll get on with the book. Och! I'm sick of business, but I'll have to get back as soon as I can. Things are in a pretty muddle. Ye can burn this litter, laddie," he concluded, pointing to various letters scattered over the bed. "They're nothin' but bills, and they'll have to wait." He hooted again.

Martin, at his task downstairs, was conscious of a new element in the atmosphere of Garroch. Hitherto it had in some indefinable way shut him and all its other occupants away from any other life but its own. All their occupation had centred round one figure, and he, to Martin at least, had seemed to pass out of existence when he had slammed the front door behind him. Now he was intimately presented for the first time as a moving influence in a vast world outside, a world in startling contrast, that knew nothing of Garroch, that dimly visualized it in some cases, perhaps, as a suburban villa like all other suburban villas. Far away there, in distant Holland, some unknown, unimagined person would soon receive this letter that Martin was copying, and that letter might have an effect upon the recipient's plans, upon the arrangement of his immediate affairs; an effect that might, conceivably, spread in small ways to the four corners of Europe. Yet that Dutchman would in all probability remain for ever ignorant of the drama that was being played in the house from which that letter was sent and by which the letter itself had been in some way affected; while Martin would never have any knowledge of the possibly no less dramatic history of the man to whom the letter was addressed.

The whole speculation was futile enough, no doubt, yet it passed through Martin's mind as a curious and interesting criticism of life. Something that he would like to discuss with Margaret. And that new element in the Garroch atmosphere was unquestionably important. It was like the stir of movement when a clock

is rewound; it was like the sound of traffic coming in through a newly-opened window . . .

"I've made one or two small corrections in that Dutch letter," said Martin when he took the correspondence upstairs to receive Greg's signature. "I've taken out one or two split infinitives."

Greg smiled. "Och! ye're altogether too precise," he said, and added, "It'll make no matter in business, but we'll have none in the book, however."

"Ye'd not make a bad secretary," he said when the letters were done.

"Thanks! I shall come to you for a testimonial," returned Martin.

"Or ye'd do fine as a warder in a lunatic asylum," added Greg, touching unexpectedly upon the secret topic.

Martin frowned uneasily. "No prospects in that job," he said. "I'd better post these at once, hadn't I?"

"Any time before twelve'll do," said Greg, "and it's not a quarter-past eleven yet. I've been thinkin' while ye were downstairs. It's occurred to me that we might ask Wotterhoose to dinner one night this week. It'll not be a bad thing for him to see me just now, I'm thinkin'. I wonder he has not written."

"Yes, I see," agreed Martin. "Shall I write to him? Which night do you think? Isn't it rather short notice to ask him for this week?"

"Maybe, but he'll come," said Greg. "Ye'd be as well to get Maggie to write; he lives with his sister and she'll have to come, too. Ye might just call to Maggie and ask her to come up."

Martin did not take the liberty of calling for Margaret, but he found her in the kitchen; and after Greg had explained his plan with some further elucidation of his purpose in projecting it, she consented to invite the Waterhouses for the following Saturday, although she confirmed Martin's opinion that it was very short notice.

"Och! make any excuse ye like," said Greg. "I have no doubt whatever but that he'll come."

Martin felt that Garroch's relations with the outer world were being rapidly extended.

3

Greg's quiet assertion that the Waterhouses would accept his invitation was justified by the promptitude of their acceptance, received by the first post next morning.

Margaret smiled as she read it and passed it over to Martin.

"I wonder why he was so certain about it," was his comment.

"Oh! he knows Mr Waterhouse right through," said Margaret.

"Do you suppose he knows me right through, too?" asked Martin, with a sudden qualm at the thought.

"No, I don't think he does," said Margaret. She was reading another letter and did not look up at him as she spoke.

Her answer flattered his egotism, but he missed its true significance; he did not recognize the admission of her own attitude. Margaret, afraid that she had said too much, remained to all appearance absorbed in her letter.

"I don't know, I expect he does," said Martin modestly.

Margaret dropped her letter then, and looked at him with something of challenge in her stare.

"You are so young, you see," she said. "One . . . he can hardly be expected to know what you'll develop into."

"You can get a sort of general idea, though, I suppose," he ventured, a little puzzled, but eager to continue this line of conversation. He hoped that perhaps Margaret might be persuaded to express her own opinion of him.

"That would not be enough for Robin," she said. "He likes to know more than that."

"I daresay he doesn't really know me very well yet," Martin said reflectively. He wanted to add "Do you?" but dare not venture so far.

"That was what I said at first," Margaret commented and returned to her letter.

But he was not satisfied to leave the conversation without some issue. "Does one ever really know oneself?" he hazarded.

She hesitated a moment and then said, "No," without looking up.

"I'm afraid I'm interrupting you," he apologized.

She gave a little sigh, folded up her letter and put it back in the envelope.

"What is it you want me to say?" she asked.

He flushed slightly at this startling comprehension of the purpose that he himself had not fully recognized until it was thus clearly expressed. "I don't want you to say anything," he said. "I'm sorry if I am bothering you to talk when you don't want to."

She smiled. "I will t-tell you one thing," she said with her little stammer. "You are extraordinarily . . . well, transparent—sometimes." That last qualification was evidently the pith of her summary, but Martin blandly overlooked it.

"I suppose I am," he said thoughtfully. "I don't try to be, you know, and I'm afraid it will be an awful handicap if I go in for politics. What could one do, do you think, to get over it?"

"Oh! don't try to get over it," returned Margaret. "That would be fatal."

"You think it's a good thing to be 'transparent' in some ways?"

"To be natural and honest?"

"Is that the same thing?"

She was half inclined to say, "In your case, yes," but she substituted, "Surely, isn't it?"

"Well, I don't know," he said, "at all events not necessarily. I mean that perhaps the natural honest person is always more or less what you call transparent; but the transparent might be—well, merely a silly ass."

"I certainly did not mean that," said Margaret, and immediately closed the discussion by asking what time the clerk from the office was to be expected. "I must tidy up Robin's room a little," she explained.

Martin, rehearsing the conversation in the study, was as uncertain as ever what Margaret thought of him. He wished that they could go back to the evening when he had held her hand in the drawing-room. They seemed to be friends then. Now, she was always keeping him at arm's length. Probably she *did* think he was "merely a silly ass." If she did, he was not inclined to contradict her.

4

The Waterhouses, brother and sister, brought another echo of traffic from the world outside when they came to dinner on Saturday evening. Through that receiver the self-centred Garroch learned that it was being discussed and its potentialities canvassed, that it could not remain detached much longer from the stir of life and the perplexities of government, but might at any time be called upon to render up its occupants to serve in the adventure of politics.

For it was inevitably of politics that Waterhouse chiefly spoke.

He came under the guardianship of his sister, and he was so wonderfully wrapped and overshod—it was a raw December night—that there was quite a function in the hall before he could be finally displayed in his velvet dinner jacket. Martin suspected him of "Jaeger," with a disparaging reflection on Oxford pamperings.

The sister was a quiet, watchful little woman of forty or so, with shrewd dark eyes. She was the only one of the

party who wore morning dress. Margaret, in a black gown, looked, Martin thought, an ideal of womanly beauty. He had not suspected, had never contemplated the existence of those splendid shoulders the outlines of which were so magnificently displayed under the thin black net that served to transform her evening gown into a demi-toilette. He regarded her with a new awe and wonder, and tried not to stare at the whiteness of her skin.

Greg, quite at his ease—although his evening dress had an air of being a little slovenly—took up the topic so soon introduced by Waterhouse with perfect readiness. They talked of men rather than of measures, of their capabilities, aptitudes and personal history; of men whom Martin had never heard, yet who seemed to be all essential for the future governing of the country.

Martin was the only one of the five who was not familiar with the detail of the inner political world. Miss Waterhouse evidently knew as much as her brother, and even Margaret was able to put in a comment now and again that was listened to with attention. Martin, following the conversation with keen interest, was chiefly wondering what these discussed personalities had done in the first instance to draw attention to their talents. Some of them, it was true, had already found seats in the House of Commons, but others appeared to have no particular qualification for the careers that were, nevertheless, considered to be possible for them.

He found, presently, however, that even so untried and hitherto undistinguished a person as himself might come under discussion.

It was Greg who, with a friendly laugh, first introduced his secretary's claim to attention.

"Eh! and there's Bond'll soon be coming on, ye'll not forget," he said slyly. "He'll be a grand opponent of Socialism, I can tell ye—thanks to my tuition."

Waterhouse looked up at Martin with his slow, half-wistful gaze. "Yes, certainly," he said. "You must

make Greg take you to some of his meetings, Bond, so that you can try your voice before an audience. There will be several opportunities, no doubt, at the beginning of the year."

Martin leaned forward eagerly. "I should like to immensely," he said. "It's so different at the Union, of course."

All unwittingly he had introduced a new note into the conversation, the note of youth. He approached this new activity in the same spirit that he had brought to the cure of Robin Greg. Martin, when he played a game, played it with such earnestness that he dignified it.

Greg and Margaret felt the effect of that sudden verve even more than the other two, although they, also, were conscious of the difference of atmosphere; and it was Greg who answered while Waterhouse, looking down at the hearthrug, was fidgeting with his beard.

"Eh, but you shall have plenty of opportunities, laddie, if ye want 'em," he said; "though perhaps ye'll not find the intricacies o' party politics quite so satisfactory in some respects as the subtleties of college football, which I'll confess are completely beyond me."

"Oh! you're always pulling my leg about football," said Martin.

"Yer turn will come when ye go into politics," returned Greg drily.

Waterhouse looked a little uneasy; his slim fingers shone ivory white against the blackness of the beard he was still harrying—and it was his sister who replied to her host's insinuation.

"You're very cynical about politics, Mr Greg," she said, with a bright smile. "You can hardly compare the government of an empire with picking a fifteen for a Rugby football match, can you?"

"Och! no, ye're right there," replied Greg, with a hoot. "It's a different matter altogether. I apologize for the comparison, Bond. I hope ye're not insulted."

Plainly Greg had no intention of kow-towing to the

editor of *The Gallery* whatever his influence with the powerful wire-pullers. Martin felt braced by this independence of attitude; he was conscious of a certain pride in the fearless atmosphere of Garroch, and he thought that Margaret's eyes were brighter than usual as though she, too, were pleased and satisfied.

Only once during the evening did he feel a twinge of doubt and annoyance, a little falling from confidence in the strength of his side.

No remark had been made on Greg's abstinence from wine at the dinner table, but later in the evening when Waterhouse was sipping a very weak whisky and soda, he filled a pause in the conversation by lifting his rather full, sleepy-looking eyes to a steady regard of his host, and saying,

"Don't you drink anything now, Greg?"

"Doctor's orders," returned Greg. "I have to be careful until me hand is well again, ye know." He moved the bandaged member slightly and looked down at it, with a touch of shamefacedness.

"Inflammation not quite reduced yet?" asked Waterhouse.

"It's goin' on well enough," Greg replied, "but I'll have to be careful awhile yet."

Martin wondered why he should have put forward so pitiful an excuse, why he should not have boldly avowed that he found it better for his general health to become a total abstainer? If he were going to depend on this plea of a wounded hand now, what would he say when the hand was healed, as it would be very soon? Already he was able to write again.

But with this one exception Greg undoubtedly shone that evening. His mind was more alert than that of Waterhouse; his criticisms of the younger politicians more apt and incisive.

Their guests left soon after ten o'clock. Waterhouse was compelled to be careful of that precious body of his. And he was already disguised in his wrappers and

overshoes before he discovered any purpose that he had formed as a result of his evening's entertainment.

"I wish you'd let me have an article on Socialism for the paper, Greg," he said, as he was saying good-bye. "Something out of the book you are writing. I can give it a good place in the February number if you can let me have it by the New Year."

"Yes, I can very well do that," replied Greg. "It'll be the economic side ye'll want treated, I suppose."

Waterhouse nodded. "Perhaps Bond will come and discuss it on Tuesday morning," he said. "And I think I have a book or two you might review for us," he added, turning to Martin.

"Oh! thanks very much—if Mr Greg doesn't mind," was the eager response.

"Och! I'll be glad to get rid of ye for an hour or two," laughed Greg.

5

When their guests had gone the three of them returned to the study—the drawing-room had not been used all the evening—to discuss the probable upshot of what had seemed to be an almost official visitation.

Greg threw himself down into his arm-chair and lit a cigarette, Margaret stood graceful and a little flushed with one arm on the mantelpiece, Martin took his old position in the chair behind the writing table. It had been pushed back almost to the harmonium to give more room for the circle round the fire, but he preferred to sit there, in the shadow, where, behind Greg's back, he could for the first time that evening steep himself for a few glorious minutes in his admiration of Margaret.

"I think it was a success," she said. "I'm sure he wants you, Robin."

Greg looked thoughtful. "He has not made up his mind, yet," he remarked. "He'll be wanting to see me again in a month's time, ye'll find."

"He's going to take your article anyhow."

"That'll not commit him one way or the other," returned Greg. "No, he's just waitin'."

"They did try hard to get something out of you," said Margaret laughing.

Greg chuckled. "I think I gave 'em as good as I got," he said.

"Oh! better. You were splendid." Margaret moved a little, and peered down at Martin under the lamp. "What are you hiding away in a corner for?" she asked.

"I'm all right, thanks," said Martin.

Greg turned partly round in his chair and looked at him. "What did ye make of it all?" he asked.

"Not very much," said Martin. "I'm not a bit quick at taking up inferences, I'm afraid. But I rather wish that you—I mean . . ." He dropped his voice and stammered, suddenly afraid of the sound of what he had been about to say.

"Ye wish what?" asked Greg, moving his chair so that he could see Martin with less effort. "What is it ye 'mean'?"

Martin looked up at Margaret to find sympathy, but she did not meet his eyes. He saw that she knew what his criticism was.

"I meant," said Martin boldly, "that I wish you hadn't made that excuse about your hand, when he asked you if you never drank anything now."

"Och!" was all Greg's comment. He turned his chair back and stretched his feet out to the fire.

"It's an excuse that won't last, you know," Martin added firmly.

And as earlier he had brought a certain freshness into the atmosphere of the conversation, so now, by his brief criticism he had seemed to touch the one vital issue. Of what account was it, after all, that Robin Greg should parry by his clever retorts the probings of that political inquisitor? The important thing, all that was of real consequence in his life, the life that might still be

made splendid, was that he should finally put his one vital enemy under his feet.

"Well, I think I'll go to bed," said Margaret, after a long silence.

"Me, too," added Martin.

"Aren't you ready, Robin?"

He looked round at the whisky and syphon on the writing table. "Ye'd be afraid to leave me here, I suppose?" he asked roughly.

Margaret hesitated, but Martin answered. "Oh! Lord, no, of course we wouldn't. I say, I'm sorry if . . ."

"Och! hold yer tongue," said Greg, getting out of his chair. "Ye've said quite enough. I'm going to bed; ye needn't be afraid. Good night to ye both."

After he had gone, Margaret and Martin looked at one another a little doubtfully.

"Oughtn't I . . ." he began.

"Oh! I wish I had your courage," she said impulsively. "You were absolutely right, and I simply dare not say it."

She held out her hand to him, an unusual favour, but he hardly touched it before she withdrew it again. "Good night," she said quickly, and left him in a tumult of happiness and doubt.

6

Waterhouse was a man with only one manner; his evasive, rather wistful, detachment from life lent him the air of one who worked always for some impersonal ambition, but on the Tuesday morning he had appointed for the interview with Martin, he succeeded in infusing a certain warmth and cordiality into his greeting.

"Let me find you those books, first," he said. "There are a couple on Socialism that you might do for the February number, taking, perhaps, the same line as the article Greg is to send us, and then we'll go into the

other room and just talk over one or two things I should like said. We have to steer a particularly careful course in our treatment of that subject at the present time—this influx of Labour Members, you understand . . .” His voice died away into the suggestion of an unspoken “and so on.”

The “other room” was evidently a retreat from all interruption, it contained no telephones, and its furnishing was more that of a Club than an office.

“We shall be quieter in here,” murmured Waterhouse, as he shut the door behind them.

It took him very few minutes to outline his policy with regard to Socialism, and to define the nature of the article he expected, and then without a break he went on,

“I daresay we shall be making certain changes in the staff next spring, Bond. I have been thinking that if you will have finished the book with Greg then, we might find a place for you here. Not only office work, of course. If you are any good on the platform by that time . . . It would, I believe, be an excellent opportunity for you . . .”

Martin’s face glowed. “It would, indeed,” he said. “Really I don’t know how to thank you. I . . .”

Waterhouse nodded kindly. “You think the book will be finished by the end of March?” he asked.

“Oh! yes, certainly,” replied Martin, without hesitation.

“Has Greg written much since you’ve been with him?”

“Yes. Oh! yes, particularly this last week.”

“Since he’s been laid up?”

“Yes, quite. You see his time is so much taken up when he has to be in the City all day.”

“No doubt. And he doesn’t feel inclined to work at night?”

“Well, you see,” said Martin, hardly realizing as yet that he was being cross-examined, “for two weeks out

of the three I've been with him, he hasn't been going to the City, so I hardly know. But I expect he will do a lot in the evenings, and on Sundays, of course, after Christmas." He felt that he must insist on Greg's application; that was a clear issue for him. He was trying to forget that first terrible week when Greg had been going up to town every day. That was a nightmare which could never come back.

"It must have been a very bad cut," remarked Waterhouse.

"Yes, it was, right through the fleshy part of the hand . . ."

"An accident in a cab, I heard," said Waterhouse, interrupting Martin's clinical demonstration.

"Yes."

"Had he been to a public dinner?" was the next question.

Martin was fully conscious of his danger now. He would have to lie, of course, that was nothing; the trouble was that he must not let Waterhouse guess that he was lying, and that would be exceedingly difficult.

"No, he had dinner at home," he said, and tried to express surprise in his tone.

Waterhouse had been watching him, but now he leaned back in his arm-chair and looked up at the portrait of Campbell-Bannerman that hung above the mantelpiece.

"I hear that Greg drinks," he said in his soft, low voice. "You may not have noticed it, perhaps, but if you are obliged to leave him earlier than April I can always manage to find a job for you here. It would be a waste of your time, obviously, to stay with him if . . . I am quite frank with you, Bond, because I feel responsible for sending you there, I should not like to think . . ."

"I don't know who your informant is," broke in Martin with a shade too much warmth, "but he ought to be jolly well kicked. I have been in the house for over

three weeks, and I must certainly have known by this time if there was any truth in a libel like that."

"Not necessarily, you know," said Waterhouse. "It may be periodical only. However I'm very glad to have your assurance. Greg is undoubtedly one of the most brilliant men we have. You'll come in, I hope, now and again, Bond. Four o'clock is really the best time. You might meet men here who would be useful to you."

7

"D'ye think he believed you?" asked Greg, when Martin had repeated the substance of his conversation with Waterhouse.

"I'm not sure—the little, hairy beast," replied Martin.

"Eh! well, I don't know that ye'd not have done better to stick to Wotterhoose," said Greg.

"I am, jolly sure," replied Martin hotly.

"So am I," agreed Margaret.

"Ye'll get no job on *The Gallery* after to-day's work, ye understand," said Greg.

"Oh! damn *The Gallery*," said Martin, and looking up at Margaret to make an apology, he saw that she was smiling her approval.

"Don't take it back," she said. "D-damn *The Gallery*."

XV. WITHIN THE HOUSE.

I

THAT brief irruption of the outside world seemed for a time to have brought about the mutual understanding which Martin had desired, and had been unable to achieve by any effort of his own. Here, at last, was a common adversary against which the three of them could unite. They were shut in again, now, safe from outside contacts; and even Forman, whose professional advice was no longer required, had fallen back into place as an undistinguished unit in that second world made up of all those who lived without the enclosure of Garroch.

Within the house, the adversary—although not so explicitly labelled—had become the topic of all conversation among that newly-combined trio, a topic that in part avoided the one uneasy subject which engrossed their secret thoughts. Yet so necessarily intimate was their relation with all they believed to lie momentarily beyond them, that some reference to the cure of Greg inevitably thrust itself sooner or later into every discussion.

When they spoke of the book on Socialism, now making such rapid and steady progress, the return of Greg to the City continually threatened them. His perpetual reflection upon and unfeigned distaste for that necessity to take up anew his business affairs provoked many futile speculations on the part of Margaret and Martin. So far all had gone incredibly well; while they had him safe within the house they could almost trust him and more especially while the "Antol" drug continued to exercise its tonic effect upon him. But they dreaded for Greg the temptations

of that vast macrocosm into which he must so soon emerge, and in the turmoil of which he would have to depend so completely upon his own will for reform.

They did not doubt that the will was his, but that was the one topic upon which he would only touch obliquely. He gave no confidence in that respect to either of them; he was alone with whatever struggle he might be enduring and they could not guess its severity, could hardly guess, indeed, if such struggle indeed existed.

And to all suggestions of taking a short holiday, of going away, with Martin, perhaps to Scotland for three weeks or a month, in order that he might regain to the full his physical health, he opposed, always with an air of determined resignation, the one unanswerable argument that his presence at the office was an absolute necessity. For he left no doubt on the minds of his hearers that his affairs were in a desperate condition and that had it not been for the fortunate interposition of Christmas he must have returned long before—whatever his condition—to take upon himself some enormous effort to save the failing house of Bickersteth, Andrew and Greg—Bickersteth, it appeared, was little more than a sleeping partner.

They came even closer to the dangerous ground when their talk was of politics. The figure of Waterhouse with all his doubts and suspicions overshadowed the future, although Greg himself occasionally professed his ability to ignore the particular means to advancement afforded by the influence of the group that spoke through *The Gallery*.

Martin, less confident and less well-informed, was not quite so hopeful; but he welcomed the topic for two reasons. In the first place he was eager to arouse all Greg's political ambitions, seeing plainly enough how much healthier would be the influence of that field than the associations of business—and, in this, as he knew, he had the full sympathy and co-operation of Margaret.

His second reason—and in that he was alone—was less obvious and less logical. For Martin, without realizing the importance of his instinct, was striving—half unconsciously, no doubt—to clear away that peculiar reservation which forbade open reference to the subject of first importance.

“Wouldn’t it be better if we could persuade him to speak about it?” he asked Margaret.

“He never will,” was her almost invariable reply; and she confirmed her statement by adding, “He never has.”

“But isn’t this cure of ours to create a new precedent altogether; in every way?” he persisted hopefully.

“You can try if you like, but I’m afraid you’ll only offend him,” was her answer.

And Martin tried, as tactfully as possible, by discussing Waterhouse.

2

These triangular discussions of theirs were exclusively confined to the two or three hours spent in the study after dinner. Sometimes Margaret and Greg played draughts, but even then the talk went on.

Martin was no longer separated from the other two by the width of the study table, which was now pushed back every evening to give him a place in the circle round the fire; and he chose to believe that this inclusion was in some way figurative of their new understanding, the new alliance that he wished so earnestly to confirm. The arrangement had been made for the first time on the evening following his interview with Waterhouse at *The Gallery* offices.

It was not, however, until the Saturday before Christmas Day (it fell on a Tuesday that year) that the final pronouncement on the subject of political influence was made by Greg, a summary that involved a statement of his own difficulties, financial and physical.

Martin began it by a mention of the Socialism article they were doing for *The Gallery*.

"It's surely a good sign that Waterhouse is accepting that," he said.

"He's not accepted it yet," returned Greg grimly. "If ye're countin' on that ye'd better wait until ye've seen it in print."

"He could hardly get out of it now, could he?" asked Margaret.

"Och! yes, in a hundred ways," said Greg. "He might want to have it altered here and there, and keep me fiddlin' with it till it was too late for the February number. Or it might, 'most unfortunately,' of course, be crowded out at the last minute. But even if he accepts and prints it, it means nothin' at all."

"It means advertising his relations with you," put in Martin.

"Ye're coming on," remarked Greg silyly. "He's quicker at the uptake than he was a month ago; d'ye not think so, Maggie?"

Margaret smiled. "It seems to be quite a good point," she said.

"Superficially, yes," went on Greg—he loved dialectic—"but when ye come to examine it, ye'll find there's very little to be made of it. In the first place the acceptance of a general article, unconnected with the immejit political programme, commits him to nothin' whatever. And in the second, Wotterhouse's relations with meself are too well-known by those that matter in this connexion, to be affected by his advertisin'—as ye call it. Ye may be quite sure that what he knows—or suspects"—he dropped his voice from its high note of argument and frowned moodily—"or suspects," he repeated bitterly, "will be common property among the dozen or so that are of any importance."

"I don't suppose he suspects anything," said Martin.

"Och! he knows all he wants to know," said Greg.

Margaret moved uneasily. "Well, he's quite wrong now, anyway," she said.

"That's of no account at all," returned Greg.

"But he's bound to find out in time that he's wrong," said Martin. He would have liked Greg to tell the whole story to Waterhouse, but that was a suggestion he did not dare, as yet. Surely, Martin thought, Waterhouse would respond to such a splendid confession and be stimulated to do all in his power to help the man who was making such a wonderful effort.

But Greg was not to be drawn into any open mention of that disgraceful topic.

"Och! ye make altogether too much fuss about the man and his influence," he said with a show of annoyance. "If I can bring off one or two deals I have in mind I'll be able to stand without troublin' the Party funds at all. However, even if I'm not able to do that, which is uncertain so long as I have Andrew for a partner, there are other roads of approachin' headquarters. *The Gallery* is not the only way. I'm very well known at the Revival Club, as well as any member there exceptin' the two Ministers, and I've one or two friends who'll not be put off by any talk of Wotterhouse's. I can stand on my own feet well enough, as soon as I get these infernal business worries off my mind. Now, Maggie, where's the dambrod?" He liked to puzzle Martin by his use of dialect words, but this one, at least, was by now quite familiar.

"Are you going to play draughts?" Martin asked, with a little sigh.

"We can play and talk, if there's anything more to say on that subject, which I doubt," replied Greg.

Margaret had not moved. She was looking down at the foot that rested—her skirt slightly lifted—on the curb of the fender. She had quite unusually beautiful feet, firm, finely arched and taper, with perfectly moulded ankles. But she was not thinking of the beauty of her own person, and she started slightly when Greg said,

"Eh! what are ye dreamin' about, Maggie? Do ye not want to play to-night?"

"Oh! yes, I'll play, Robin," she said abruptly.

Martin got up and fetched the board and placed the little folding table for them.

Only one more reference was made to Waterhouse that evening, a few words of defence from Greg.

"There's just one thing about Wotterhooose," he said suddenly, breaking in upon a failing conversation between the other two. "I do not think ye quite do him justice, Bond. Ye must remember that he's a man who has set his mind on one thing, and no doubt he'll do much to serve the Party that ye don't quite approve. But when a man is not workin' to serve his personal ambition ye must not be too hard on him. Ye see Wotterhooose is justified in being very careful about the men he finds a backin' for; and I don't blame him, meself, for tryin' to get information in one way, if he can't get it in another that'd maybe seem to ye, perhaps, a trifle more straightforward. Politics is often a dirty game, and he plays it cleaner than most of them. Personally, I've no quarrel with Wotterhooose over this business, none at all.

"Eh! well, I'm for my bed," he went on, before Martin could reply. "Good night."

Martin could not decide whether this defence were made to clear the way for a renewal of the relations with Waterhouse, or if it were only prompted by a feeling of loyalty.

3

But, despite Greg's present reserves and the still uncertain promise of a future that held the awful test of his return to all the harassing intrigues and displayed temptations of his business life, those few days before Christmas were the happiest that Martin had spent at Garroch. His relations with Margaret were still

unaltered—she still kept him from any approach to a more intimate friendship—he had not gained any further ground in his relations with Robin Greg, but the three of them were, at last, in apparent agreement, there was a tacit understanding between them, if speech was still forbidden; they had common interests to discuss, the book, their political ambitions, the outside adversary; they had a common cause for fear in their anxiety for the welfare of Greg's business speculations—the precise nature of which Martin did not fully understand—they were, in fact, united in sympathy and endeavour, especially and peculiarly in this wonderful effort to retrieve the master of the house from the awful degradations of alcoholism. And the cure, so far, was such a triumphant success that no terror of possible bankruptcy could outweigh that enormous benefit. Once he was his own man again Robin Greg was bound to succeed; his occasional fits of gloom and loss of self-confidence were no more than the after-effects of the long bout that had gone before. "One could not," Martin argued, "expect him to recover his normal balance in three weeks."

Martin's only exercise and his only chance of fresh air during this time was taken between three and five o'clock in the afternoon; and those determined walks of his were filled with strenuous, practical plans for a future that was not all his own, rather than with the dreams of youth. His experience had begun to affect and harden him into resolution; and if he constantly regretted that Margaret could not accompany him, he preferred, heroically, the solitary grateful reflection of duty well done to any walk, however glorified by Margaret's presence, that entailed the anxiety of leaving Robin alone in the house. For as yet they did not care to leave him quite alone, nor did he seem to wish it.

On Christmas Eve, however, Martin was inclined for once to stay in the house. Outside, a high cold wind and a driving sleety rain, that might later change to snow,

offered an uncomfortable alternative to the friendly warmth of the study. He was not afraid of the weather; he had been out for his walk on worse afternoons, but he was suddenly allured by the possibility of a quiet talk with Margaret, or failing that, she might be induced to sing to them. He never saw her alone now, save for that cold quarter of an hour over the breakfast table, time always filled with discussion of Greg's progress—she had been more optimistic lately.

The hour after lunch was always spent alone with Greg in the study; he read his morning paper then, making comments now and again or reading aloud a paragraph here and there to Martin who filled the intervals with a novel. Margaret was busy with her housework, she helped Hester in many ways when "Nanna" was fully occupied with the care of Biddie.

What happened between three and five Martin did not know, but he fancied that Greg went to sleep. And anticipating that lapse, he sat very still on this particular afternoon, planning to leave the room quietly in the hope of finding Margaret. They might, perhaps, talk in the cold drawing-room for a time; Greg's sleep would furnish an excuse for not going back to the study.

But as the usual hour for Martin's walk passed, Greg, so far from going to sleep, began to manifest signs of restlessness and discomfort. He dropped his paper once or twice and looked at Martin, who following his own plan of action, kept his eyes on his book.

At last Greg threw down his paper and yawned, evidently with intention. "Are ye not going for your walk?" he asked.

"I don't know. It's such a beastly day," said Martin.

"Oh! ye're not a Scotchman," returned Greg. "I notice that every Englishman's afraid of a drop o' rain. We'd call this a mist in the North."

"It isn't that," said Martin. "I've been out when it was wetter than this. Only I don't know that I feel much inclined to go to-day." He was slightly piqued by

the aspersion of his nationality, and his tone was somewhat formal.

"I thought ye told me that ye felt so 'stuffy'—was that yer word?—when ye didn't get a walk in the afternoon," said Greg.

"Oh! I'll go if you want to get rid of me," said Martin.

"Och! there's no need to get huffy about it," returned Greg. "It'll make no difference to me one way or the other. Please yourself."

Martin yawned and went over to the window. He saw that Greg was in one of his fretful moods, and that the prospect before him was quite probably that of an afternoon spent in a discussion that might become acrimonious.

Greg's next words confirmed that possibility.

"I notice," he said, "that Englishmen make a wonderful boastin' of their cold baths and their exercise and fresh air and what not, and I sometimes wonder why they feel bound to talk so much about it all. Maybe ye can tell me."

"I didn't know they did," said Martin, coming back into the room. "Anyway it looks a bit better now, so I think I'll go after all. I don't feel much inclined for an argument about the relative virtues of the English and Scotch races."

"Naturally," returned Greg. "Ye have such a poor case."

"Oh! have it your own way," said Martin with a smile, but as he put on his overcoat, he wondered whether Greg had not indeed wanted to be rid of him.

A sudden suspicion shook him, and he went to the door of the kitchen and knocked gently. Margaret opened the door to him; she was turning down the sleeves of her blouse.

"I've been drying while Hester washed," she explained. "Did you want me?"

"Well, I'm just going out," said Martin in a low voice,

"and somehow I had the feeling that he wanted to get rid of me. I thought, perhaps, I'd better tell you, you know."

Margaret came into the hall shutting the kitchen door behind her, and the sound of crockery being put back none too quietly by Hester, was suddenly stilled.

"I was afraid for a moment, I don't know why," said Martin, whispering in the quietness of the hall.

Margaret's face showed an expression of perplexity and uneasiness under the light of the staircase window. "Oh! that's all right," she said. "It isn't that, but—Oh! well, perhaps I'd better go in to him." She pursed her mouth and looked doubtfully towards the study.

"I don't quite understand," said Martin.

"You will, quite soon," she said, with a grimness Martin had never seen on her face before. "I hope you'll have a good walk," she added as she left him.

4

"Good" was hardly the adjective that described the first half of his walk that afternoon. The lull observed from the study window had been the prelude to a fiercer storm, and to the physical distress caused by wind-driven sleet, a new mental disturbance was added. He had apparently stumbled upon another mystery, some secret in which he had as yet no part, but which presently was to be discovered to him. "Quite soon," she had said. And this secret must have been shared by Margaret and Robin, during that time when it had seemed that the three of them were in such perfect accord.

Martin felt that he was no longer a member of that little confederation within the walls of Garroch. He was an "outsider" no less than any other member of the feebly invading world; he could never enter fully into the private councils of those two who were so far

separated from him by race and family history. They liked him, they appreciated his efforts on their behalf, but beyond a certain point they would give him no confidence.

Martin walked with his head down, facing the storm; he carried with him all the influence of the house out of which he had come.

But when he turned his face again towards home, his spirits lifted. His blood ran more freely, and braced by his opposition of the wind, his physical energy seemed almost too great for the ease of the return journey. Examined objectively, his recent depression now appeared quite unreasonable. If there had been a secret it was soon to become known to him. And at most it must be some trivial affair, of even less importance than the hiding of the bottles. All his late fears were suddenly referable to the fact that he had wanted exercise.

"I'm jolly glad I came out," was his diagnosis of the whole mood.

He entered the study with a high colour; he looked fresh and wonderfully vigorous.

"I've had a ripping walk," he said, and half unconsciously glanced at the closed windows.

"Yer tea's all ready," remarked Greg obliquely, "we didn't wait for ye."

There was an air of evasion and uneasiness in the room. Margaret leaned back in the corner of her arm-chair and stared up at the mantelpiece; and even Greg wore an unaccustomed manner that had in it something shifty and propitiatory. He seemed, for once, to be ill at ease.

"Ye look fine and strong after yer walk," he said, as Martin attacked his tea with appetite. "Are ye not glad, now, that ye took my advice?"

"Oh! yes, rather," agreed Martin. A spirit of doubt was already invading him, but it had not yet driven out the confidence of his physical well-being.

"Did ye go far? Ye've been a long time," persisted

Greg, and he continued to ask questions and to make comments on Martin's description of his walk; he might have been entertaining an influential guest.

Martin's suspicions grew. He looked uneasily at Margaret, but she would not meet his eye, and he noticed that her hands moved restlessly in her lap.

Something must have happened, he thought, something odd. He wondered suddenly if they meant to turn him out of Garroch; to thank him for what he had done and tell him that his services were no longer required?

He dropped into a moody silence, and only Greg continued to talk—he was telling a story of some house that Martin must have passed in his walk that afternoon.

"Have you finished?" Margaret interposed at length, addressing Martin.

"Me? Oh! my tea. Yes, thanks," he replied.

"Then I'll take it away and leave you to talk," she said, rising. And as she packed the tray, she looked once at Martin; a curious look, he thought, full of question and something else that might have been pity. Or was it, perhaps, a look of self-excuse? He felt as if she had made some important confidence to him, and that he had failed to hear her.

"Take the arm-chair, Bond," said Greg, when the two were left alone. "What will ye smoke?"

Martin moved into the arm-chair so lately occupied by Margaret; it was still redolent of her presence and he leaned his head back into the corner in which hers had lain. "I won't smoke, at present, thanks," he replied to Greg's question.

"I've something to tell ye." The announcement was definite enough, but there was hesitation in the tone of Greg's voice. He had settled himself down into his old position, stretched out in line from feet to neck, his eyes stared into the fire, he appeared to be brooding deeply on the matter of his communication.

"I am a lonely man, Bond," he said, after a long interval.

Martin, utterly puzzled, could find no comment to make. In his heart he was thinking that his companion's loneliness had been of his own making.

"And it's likely ye'll not understand that," continued Greg, after a pause, "because ye'll never have experienced the sort of loneliness I mean." He looked up for a moment with a quick inquiring glance.

"I daresay I haven't," said Martin curtly. He most certainly failed to understand.

"It's the kind of loneliness," said Greg, staring into the fire again, "that drives a man to desperation. Ye've been a good friend to me, Bond, since ye've been here, and I'm grateful to ye for all ye've done, but I cannot go on unless I have someone to understand me; someone, ye see, who's known me all my life or nearly. There are things I'm not able to speak about. It's maybe a great weakness in me, but I'm just not able to speak of them, and there's only one person left, now, who can make all allowances for me. I'm speakin' very openly to ye, Bond, more openly maybe than I've ever spoken to anyone outside my own family, and I hope ye'll realize from that the sort of feelin' I have towards ye."

Martin mumbled some sort of appreciation. He felt dried up, unable to respond with any frank expression of sentiment, or to make even so much as a deprecatory reference to his own part in their late endeavour. He was bewildered; he had no least idea what was coming; and yet a terrible, shapeless foreboding oppressed him, some dread he could not recognize.

He moved restlessly in his chair. "You've been very good to me," he said in a low voice. "But I don't understand . . ."

Greg did not respond to that. "And I hope," he went on, "that we'll make a success of this book. I see no reason why we should not. There'll be no difference in the house, and when I have to go back to the City next

Monday, I hope to find time in the evenings." He stopped again and looked at Martin. "Ye're anxious to finish the book?" he asked.

"Yes, of course I am," said Martin.

"And this engagement'll make no difference to ye in any way?"

"Engagement?" asked Martin blankly.

"Well, I thought ye'd have guessed it," said Greg.

"Of course the Bill has not been passed yet, but it's quite certain that it'll go through next year, and Maggie and I can wait till then. In any case it'll not be many months."

Martin sat quite still, trying to understand whether Greg had implied that he was going to marry Margaret. He thought that he must have made some grotesque mistake.

"Do you mean . . ." he began.

"Ye're not very forward with yer congratulations," replied Greg.

"Well, it's rather unexpected," said Martin. "I hadn't guessed; I hadn't even thought of it. But, of course, I congratulate you. I suppose you meant the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, didn't you? I could not imagine what you were driving at." He felt cold, but curiously unhurt. He remembered the story of a man who had been mortally wounded and had never felt the pain of the blow.

"I think I'll just go upstairs and change," he said. "These things are a bit wet."

Only one sentence of all that explanation remained clearly in his mind. "Maggie and I can wait till then," Greg had said.

Was she, then, so eager? Martin wondered stupidly.

But no report of Robin's could ever have revealed the truth to Martin Bond, for however honest the account

might have been it would have failed by just so much as Robin himself had failed to understand Margaret.

He knew so much that he believed he knew all, and when he had opened his heart to her, confessing his need for larger sympathy and understanding, she had seemed to respond with no more reserve than he thought inevitable in her.

His first plea had been at once reasonable and human. He had spoken almost openly, for once, of himself and his great temptation; he had shown so clearly his need for her in that respect.

Then came the change of note, sincere enough on his part, and with it that reserve of hers which he falsely construed.

She was willing to give so much heroically, but hardly on these grounds. The sight of his passion suddenly chilled the splendour of the sacrifice, while he by a false analogy read into that withdrawal of hers, an acknowledgment of willingness that she was too proud to show otherwise.

He even apologized.

"I know I've been terribly hard on ye when I've not been myself," he said. "I've behaved as I'd never have thought it possible I could. But ye'll not bring that up against me now, Maggie; I know well that ye're not that sort of woman. Ye've a great heart, and ye understand that I was not responsible altogether, sometimes."

She smiled sadly. "Oh! of course I know that, Robin," she said.

He accepted her statement, but he believed that if the past was condoned it could not yet be forgotten. Nevertheless he put it from him, and asked a question that had been in his mind from the beginning.

"And there'll be no one else?" he suggested. No plainer definition of his thought was needed between him and her.

She looked at him with apparently frank amusement.

" Oh! Robin. Who else *could* there be? " she asked, and her frankness rebuked and confused him.

" Och! no," he said. " I was just not quite sure if ye'd forgotten that affair of yours in Leipzig."

She shrugged her shoulders, uncertain whether her feeling was one of relief. " It's seven years ago," she said, and added, " Besides, it never came to anything, never could."

" Then ye'll try to put up with me, dear? " he said, coming back to the real issue.

She smiled, surer now of the grounds for sacrifice. " It's to be a bargain, though, Robin," she said, and stood up. " You know you just hate me when—when you're not yourself."

" Ye can trust me now," he returned, with a new confidence that completely confirmed her. " I'll have something to live for."

" Never once again, anything! " she stipulated with a look which showed him that she knew his answer. " Not even by doctor's orders! "

" Ye'll not be afraid," he said, and he came and stood beside her and put his arm across her shoulders.

She hardly knew then whether the mere caress were distasteful; it was so much more endurable than the look in his eyes; she had seen something so like that before when the desired thing had not been a woman. And it was to avoid his eyes that she dropped her head.

He kissed her hair and then his grasp of her shoulder tightened. " Maggie," he whispered hotly.

But she was saved for the moment by the coming of Hester with the tea-tray, and before he could decently return to his love-making they heard Martin come in.

" I'll have to tell him," Robin said, with a certain suggestion of glee in his tone; but when he had come to the telling the greatness of him had triumphed over his little exaltation.

6

To Martin, however, all that rather tender explanation had conveyed but one idea with which he set himself to wrestle when he was in the safety of his own cold bedroom.

He had come to a realization of his own secret thoughts with a shock that was as paralysing as it was unexpected. He had not known till then that the desire to be more than a humble friend to Margaret had even entered his mind.

If he had been a feeble lover he might have run away, less to save his private vanity than to avoid the pain of seeing Margaret possessed by another; but the old ideal of protective service still ruled him, a stronger influence than the ideal of his own suffering. From the first Margaret had appeared to him as a figure of dignity, commanding his respect; he had not dared to approach her too nearly either in act or thought; and if she had not been suddenly presented to him as the possible wife of another, he might have continued his detached adoration until she put out her hand to lift him.

And even now the emotion that swayed him was one of fear and concern rather than of jealousy. A terrible doubt of Robin Greg had sprung into being; for, remembering all that story of past weakness, Martin could only, in these new conditions, question the certainty of a reform that had only lasted for three weeks. In his eager optimism, he had hardly regarded this aspect of the cure when all his own interests had lain in one balance of the scale. Now, he approached more nearly to a vision of the great problem as a whole; and if his vision was but a transient one its effects were to endure. He had come to the border of his first intimate association with the wonderful complexities of life . . .

For the moment, however, he saw no escape. He must, he thought, be content to sacrifice himself and to suffer.

His ambition to set Robin Greg right with himself and the world remained; only the motive was changed, becoming less personal, more purely altruistic.

Martin shrugged his shoulders, happily avoiding any self-congratulation on his choice of issues. He did not even consider the effect that any persistence in self-sacrifice might have upon his own character. He saw but one clearly-defined motive; his single desire to serve Margaret.

How hard that service was to become, he realized on that first evening of the new conditions.

Through dinner, he felt self-conscious. He found that he could not look at Margaret, and was embarrassed by the consciousness of his inability. In the study, he took up again his old position behind the writing-table; and when Greg pressed him to come to the fire, excused himself on the plea that he was already too hot.

The conversation stuttered on brokenly for a time and then as Greg took up a book, Martin followed his example. From his ambush he ventured at last a brief glance at Margaret, but her face was hidden from him by the "ear" of her arm-chair.

He was wondering how soon he must go upstairs and leave these two alone. He hated the thought, but saw that he must accustom himself to it; and with a certain eagerness to torture himself, qualified, perhaps, by the wish to display his indifference to Margaret, he decided to go half an hour earlier than usual.

On this evening, however, neither sacrifice nor boast was possible, for at nine o'clock Margaret expressed her intention of going to bed.

"I've a headache to-night," she pleaded in excuse.

She said "good-night" to Greg, but he immediately got out of his chair, evidently prepared to follow her into the hall.

Martin kept his head bent over his book, but he raised it when Margaret wished him good-night and met her eyes for the first time since, long ages ago, she

had looked at him that afternoon over the tea-tray. And now, as then, he failed to read the message of her expression, although he could not doubt that some message was intended. Her eyes were so earnest, so searching.

Greg closed the door behind them as he went out, but he returned to the study almost immediately. Their embrace, if any embrace had been exchanged, must have been incredibly brief.

"Here, come up to the fire for Heaven's sake," said Greg, when he had sat down again. "It annoys me to see ye sitting out there in the cold."

"I'm not cold," said Martin, but he went over to the fire.

"Ye seem dull to-night," continued Greg.

"I'm not," Martin replied, with a pale assumption of cheerfulness. He had brought his book with him and began to read again; and Greg, after a long stare, did not further interrupt him, until at ten o'clock he remarked casually,

"Have ye forgotten that to-morrow will be Christmas Day?"

Martin looked up. "Almost," he said, "but I don't suppose it will make any difference to us."

"Och! no," said Greg, "we take little account of it in Scotland. But there'll be Biddie's presents to give her and maybe we'll give her some sort of a treat in the afternoon."

"Oh! yes, I see," returned Martin indifferently. "Well, are you going up? I think I'll go too. We're early to-night."

When he was in his own room, pleasantly conscious of relief from all restraint, Martin began to ponder the message of Margaret's eyes. He was glad that she should have troubled to bother about him at all; and from that he fell, for the first time, into a reflection on the possibility of other relationships between him and her. If he had been newly engaged to her, would she, he wondered,

have released herself so quickly from him when he said good-night? He thrilled at the thought that he could, even in imagination, hold her in his arms. But if she had deigned to give herself to one man, that man might as well have been Martin Bond as Robin Greg . . .

The wind still shouted fiercely round the house, but above the incoherent voices of the gale, Martin could hear now and again a familiar sound that seemed to have been stilled during the past two weeks—the old restless clamour of the unfastened gate had returned.

For some time he stood at the window peering out into the night.

XVI. REDIVISION.

I

MARGARET was standing by the fire in the little dining-room when Martin came down to breakfast.

"Isn't it a beautiful, bright, cold morning?" she said cheerfully. "A wet, foggy Christmas is so miserable. Don't you hate them?"

He understood that she had given him the note, if not for all their future relations, at least for this morning's conversation. There were to be no explanations. She would not justify herself, she would, in all probability, make no reference whatever to her engagement to Robin.

He wished that he could disregard, with equal complacency, this last redivision of the household into two sides, that he could forget his own present redundancy.

"Oh! yes, beastly," he said in answer to her question. He stood by the window and looked out. The sun was hardly above the horizon yet, but there had been a slight frost in the night and the air smelt sharp and fresh; and even the dullness of Demetrius Road was strangely enlivened.

"We hardly ever get snow at Christmas, now," he went on. "Do you suppose the old-fashioned Christmas is only a myth?" He had made the same remark or heard it made by others a hundred times before, but anything served. He was even glad that it should be so banal.

Their conversation throughout the breakfast remained at the same level. As soon as he had finished, Martin escaped to the study.

For ten minutes he stood on the hearth-rug, trying to

reconcile himself to the thought of a day's occupation that would differ in no essential from the work of any other day. Recently he had come to some such contemplation as this with a certain enjoyment and zeal; the prospect had appeared interesting, attractive. This morning his picture of the day before him presented itself as something utterly flat and unendurable. He was at once too excited and too bored to face a morning with Greg, followed by all the familiar and suddenly repulsive details of the inevitable afternoon and evening. The mid-day dinner, the usual walk over the now well-explored ground, the tea with Robin, Margaret and Biddie—there would be hymns on the harmonium, no doubt—and, worst of all, the time after supper when he would sit alone, passing the dreary minutes until he must get up and leave the other two together. He decided that he simply could not face it.

He went up to his own room and put on his boots. Then he knocked at Greg's door.

A sleepy voice requested him to "Come in."

"I suppose to-day is a holiday of sorts," said Martin, without any preliminary greeting. The windows were close shut and the room smelt warm and stuffy.

Greg raised himself on his elbow and stared at him rather stupidly. "I thought it was Hester with my breakfast," he said. "What's the time?"

"A quarter-past nine," said Martin, and added, "Would you mind if I went out to-day?"

"Where are ye goin'?" asked Greg.

"I thought I'd go and see a couple of men at the Settlement," returned Martin.

"They'll be away," remonstrated Greg.

"Someone's sure to be there," said Martin.

Greg looked at him suspiciously. "Och! you can do as ye like," he said. "Will ye be away all day?"

"Probably."

Greg lay down again in bed and pulled the clothes up to his chin. "Eh! well," he remarked, "ye might tell

Hester to hurry up with my breakfast, and Maggie's not brought me the medicine this morning, either." He gave a glance at the table by the bed.

"There isn't any more," replied Martin. "You had the last bottle yesterday." He thought Greg looked a trifle uneasy, but he only nodded, and turning over on his side presented a back view of his ruffled head.

"I'll tell Hester," said Martin, as he went out. He wanted, also, to tell Margaret that he would be out all day. This errand gave him an excuse for going to the kitchen.

But Hester, who met him in the hall with the breakfast tray in her hands, told him that Miss Hamilton was not in the kitchen. "She'll be in the nursery, no doubt," she explained. "Will I say you'll be wanting her?"

"Oh! no, thanks, don't bother," said Martin. "I only wanted to say that I should be out all day. Perhaps you would tell her."

He would have preferred to give the message himself, but he did not wish to give it too great an air of importance. He had never been up to the nursery, and felt that he could not invade those unknown regions for the first time on so trivial an errand. It was, however, just possible that Margaret might still be in the dining-room, and when Hester had gone upstairs he hesitated a moment and then tried his last chance.

She was there, standing by the mantelpiece in the attitude that was now so familiar to him.

"Oh! I just wanted to tell you that I am going out, Miss Hamilton," he said.

She looked up at him with a touch of surprise.

"Where?" she asked.

"I thought of going to see some of the men at my old Settlement," he explained.

"Will you be away long?" she asked.

"All day, I expect," he said.

"Why?"

"I feel like it," he said, rather ungraciously.

She looked down again at the fire. "Very well," she said apathetically. "Do you want a latch-key?"

Martin shook his head. "Oh! no, I shall be back by ten o'clock," he said. "You are sure to be up then."

"Robin will," she said.

"You don't mind my going?" he asked.

"I? No, why should I?" She looked at him with something of defiance in her face.

"Well, only—I mean it's quite safe to leave him alone, now, of course?"

"Absolutely," replied Margaret with conviction.

He had never heard quite that tone in her voice before when she had spoken of Robin.

"He asked me why you hadn't brought him the medicine this morning," said Martin. "I told him that he had had it all."

"What did he say?" she asked indifferently.

"He didn't say anything," returned Martin.

"Won't you miss your train?" she asked, after a pause.

"I'm going to walk," he explained.

She showed no surprise. "I hope you'll have a nice day," was her only comment made with the air of ending the conversation.

Martin could hardly claim that the interview had been an encouragement to him, and yet he could not avoid a feeling of satisfaction—she might have been factitiously cheerful at breakfast, but she certainly had showed no joy in the anticipation of a long day alone with her fiancé.

2

The ten-mile walk across London invigorated him and cleared his mind. At the Settlement he found the one man he had particularly hoped to see, and the old influences of the place and his companion took hold of him. At half-past six that afternoon, he was debating

whether he would not leave Garroch. He had done a certain work there and had come with some credit out of a difficult situation. Margaret was now hopeful, even confident, that the cure of Robin Greg would be a success. He might leave the rest to her; she had taken all responsibility from him by entering into an engagement that made Martin's presence in the house superfluous.

Sitting there in his friend's neat, clean room, Martin had a great revulsion of feeling against some influence of the Garroch atmosphere that overcame him when he was in the house itself. Even now he could not define it, although vaguely the thing was associated chiefly with Greg's bedroom.

"Why shouldn't I cut the whole affair?" he wondered, and for a moment he felt an inclination to tell the whole story to his friend. Was there anything to tie him, any convention, duty or desire? Had not the last bond been broken by Margaret's engagement; how could he possibly be responsible for her future welfare?

For one little instant of time, he realized the possibility of freedom, of his own independence in the scheme of life. In one brief pause of conversation the whole problem of his existence had been presented to him in a new light. But even as he tried to hold and understand the vision, the thought of Margaret drew him irresistibly. He knew that whether she wished it or not, he could not leave her to fight alone; that even when she was married he must stay within call of her. He felt neither happiness nor sorrow in the knowledge, he only knew that the thing was inevitable, unavoidable.

And at once he became uneasy; fidgeting, longing to be back in Demetrius Road. He had promised his friend that he would stay to supper, and he had no excuse to make for so curiously changing his mind; but he did not care, all conventions of ordinary behaviour seemed foolish and meaningless when weighed against the urgency of his desire to return to Margaret . . .

He reached Garroch at a quarter to nine, and

looked inquiringly at Hester when she let him in. He had come to believe that something unusual must have happened in his absence, that Margaret had, indeed, called to him.

But Hester only smiled and said, "Ye're not so late," and when he went into the study he found Greg alone.

He almost echoed Hester's greeting, adding, "Maggie has gone to her bed. She has a headache."

No one had wanted him, Martin thought with a pang of disappointment; he had had no wonderful experience, he had obeyed the command of his subconscious desire, that was all.

"I'm sorry," he said conventionally, and then for something to say, he asked if Biddie had enjoyed her Christmas.

"I don't know what I'll do with that child," Greg returned moodily. "I fear that Maggie is too easy with her. She was very naughty after tea, and there's no one but me can do anything at all with her. I'm thinking of sending her to my sister in Scotland."

"What did she do?" asked Martin.

Greg did not reply. He looked gloomy and depressed.

"We can finish that article for *The Gallery* to-morrow," he said after a long pause. "I was looking through it this morning and I've made a few notes of things I'd like ye to alter, but it will do very well otherwise."

For a time they talked disconnectedly of their work. At half-past nine Greg announced his intention of going to bed.

"I'm fashed about Biddie," he explained, and then after a moment's hesitation he said inconsequently, "I suppose there'd be a tonic in that medicine ye gave me?"

"Yes, there is, I know," said Martin.

"Eh! well, I fancy I've missed it to-day," said Greg. "Good night to ye."

3

His talk with Greg provided Martin with subject for polite conversation at the breakfast table next morning, a subject recognizably preferable to any account of his own day at the Settlement. Garroch seemed to insist that only its own interests should be discussed within those four walls, the irrelevant affairs of the world at large were so foolishly unimportant in comparison.

He began at once to speak of Biddie, and so learnt the story of her misbehaviour, another of those odd revolts of hers against authority, persisted in on this occasion beyond all reasonable limits. Her father himself had not been able to subdue her for quite a long time.

Margaret showed signs of some distress at the matter of her narration, but she clung to the subject and amplified it.

Martin was quite willing to listen; he was trying to piece together the story of Margaret's day.

"What time did you get her to bed?" he asked when the story on its psychological side had almost been exhausted.

"About six," Margaret said. "You see she began it before tea."

Martin nodded. "And after that?"

"She was quite good after that. She's never so sweet as she is after she's been naughty."

"I suppose you stayed up in the nursery with her until bedtime?"

"Oh! no, I didn't. She wanted me to stay, of course, but I had to punish her in some way."

Margaret was still absorbed in her thought of Biddie; but Martin had nearly forgotten her, and so far had his eagerness to discover the relations of Robin and Margaret outrun his discretion that his next question was presented with a certain irrelevance—he had meant to lead up to it less openly.

"What were you doing about half-past six?" he asked.

For a moment, Margaret appeared unable to gather his intention, and then Martin saw the colour flush from her neck to her forehead—almost deliberately, it seemed, so slow was the invasion. She looked perturbed and uncomfortable, but she did not hide her face; she stared steadily before her at the jardinière in the centre of the table.

"Why?" she asked at last.

He had no doubt of the meaning of her blush. He looked for but one explanation and found it with secret exultation. She had wanted him at that minute. Why, he did not trouble to inquire.

"I had a sort of intuition," he said, speaking quickly to cover her embarrassment. "I felt somehow when I was at the Settlement that you wanted me, I didn't know why. I thought, of course, that it was because of Mr Greg, but he seemed quite all right when I came in. But, I wanted to tell you, he asked me if there were any tonic in the 'Antol' cure stuff; he said he had missed it; the effects of the tonic, I suppose."

She kept her eyes away from him; the blush still burnt her, her little ears glowed red under the shadow of her hair.

"You came as quickly as you could, I suppose?" she said in a low, even voice.

"Of course," said Martin, "but I was a long time getting back, the trains weren't running properly, being Christmas Day. I expect I could have walked it in the time. It—it was a new experience for me. I was rather—disappointed when I got back. I thought . . . But it was quite all right, wasn't it?"

"Yes, quite," she said. "Have you finished? I ought to be going."

She got up quickly and went out, leaving her own breakfast almost untouched. During the first half of the meal, she had been so occupied with her story of Biddie.

4

Martin settled down to work again that morning. He felt that he had been reinstated. Margaret could give him no confidences and he would ask for none, but she desired his presence in the house.

And he tried, with all his natural honesty, to concentrate his thought upon that one aspect of the situation. He tried to see himself always as her humble servant, willing to endure anything for her, even boldly to face—in some distant future—her marriage with Robin Greg. But, quite unconsciously, his attitude towards the ruling spirit of Garroch was undergoing a subtle change. Martin admired Greg's cleverness, appreciated his fine qualities no less than before, but the man had become again, in some sense, the enemy; he figured so inevitably as the danger against which Margaret was to be protected.

The effect upon Martin was shown in a growing impatience of Greg's dogmatic pronouncements whether in connexion with their work upon the book, or upon that more intimate controversy as to the relative virtues of the English and the Scotch as national types.

"Och! ye'll know better when ye've had a little more experience," was Greg's usual conclusion, and Martin would shrug his shoulders and sulk. Before the end of the week he was looking forward to the time when Greg would be absent all day in the City . . .

Margaret made no further allusion to Martin's first experience in what he had decided was a clear case of telepathy. He would have liked immensely to discuss it with her, quite impersonally, to put forward the theory he had formed that he had become newly sensitive to certain influences as an outcome of living in sympathetic surroundings. But her manner made it quite clear to him that she wished to avoid any recurrence to that subject—whenever he approached it, however distantly,

at breakfast, she always diverted the conversation; she seemed able to anticipate the possible introduction of that topic from the most innocent, and apparently inappropriate remarks.

When they were alone they talked almost exclusively of Biddie. It was impossible for them, now, to speak of Greg and his progress towards a certain cure. He belonged to Margaret in a new and intimate way that excluded him from any discussion. There must be a tacit assumption that he possessed all the perfections; he could no longer be regarded as a patient between them, since he was the man whom Margaret had chosen as her future husband. That single occasion on the morning after Christmas Day, had been an exception, the result of peculiar circumstances. But what precisely was Margaret's feeling for Robin, Martin could not determine. At the back of his mind was a curious certainty that it was impossible she could really love him.

In that conclusion Martin was certainly upheld by his observation of their daily intercourse. Margaret was less pliant than she had been during the first three weeks of her stay in Garroch, less anxious to please the master of the house; she was, in one sense at least, apparently less afraid of him. Robin, on his side, had become more polite, more deferential. He looked at her with more tenderness, even at times with something in his eyes that was almost a supplication. In her presence he was in comparatively good spirits, he talked brilliantly at times, he made a show of being active and energetic. But when he was alone with Martin, he often gave evidence of mental depression and irascibility; as a collaborator he was becoming increasingly difficult to work with. It was certain that he dreaded his return to the City

But the thing that had most significance for Martin was the fact that Robin and Margaret were hardly ever alone together. If she were in the study when Martin returned from his afternoon walk—he had somewhat

shortened the length of his absence recently—Biddie was there also, and Margaret always found some excuse to leave the room before Martin at night. Robin always followed her into the hall, but their "Good night" was never prolonged, never more than a few seconds elapsed before Martin heard her run upstairs.

The first exception to that rule was provided on the Sunday night that preceded Greg's return to the City.

5

They had openly discussed that return with Robin during the evening, and Margaret had urged him to take another week's rest. Martin had joined in perfunctorily, dreading that his arguments might prove too convincing.

"Surely one more week wouldn't matter," he had said, "especially so soon after Christmas."

"Och! ye know nothing whatever about it," returned Greg impatiently. "Isn't Tuesday the New Year, and there's a devil of a lot to be done. D'ye think I'd not sooner stay here and finish the book? I just have to go back, I tell ye, and it's no good talkin' about it."

"But, Robin, if your health depends on it," urged Margaret, "if you knock yourself up, the business will just go to smash altogether."

"It'll likely do that in any case," said Greg, with a bitter laugh and an uneasy look at Margaret; "but it's no use haverin' about it, I must do what I can." And then with a sudden change to a more optimistic note, he began to discuss the possibilities of getting his affairs round the corner. "If I can pull off that Dutch business, we'll be all right for a bit," he concluded.

"You ought to go away for a fortnight," persisted Margaret. "With Mr Bond," she explained, "to Scotland or somewhere for a complete change of air."

"I'll go when this Dutch business is settled," said Greg. "If Bond'll come, that is?" he added.

"Oh! rather, I'll come," said Martin.

They talked later than usual that evening, but as Martin was wondering whether on this night he ought not, exceptionally, to get up and leave them alone, Margaret anticipated him.

Robin, as usual, followed her into the hall.

That was a moment which always tested Martin's endurance. He had tried, desperately, never to picture the kiss—one kiss at least must be given and returned—and the short embrace that must be interchanged. If no intimate caress marked their parting why did they say good night in the hall? But he had become partly inured by custom—their time together was so absurdly short—and it came as a new shock and terror to him to-night, when more than a minute passed and still he had not heard Margaret go upstairs.

He stood up and bit his lip; he was suddenly furiously impatient, and then he heard Margaret's voice say clearly, "Oh! Robin! no." There was something of fear in her tone; something, too, of disgust.

Martin clenched his hands and took a quick step towards the door. He was full of passionate rage and jealousy; prepared to face Greg, to knock him down, to do some mad, irrevocable thing.

But before he reached the door he heard Margaret's footsteps on the stairs; he heard, also, Greg's little hooting laugh, subdued in tone, but at that moment horribly repulsive.

He came into the room the next moment and met Martin almost on the threshold.

"Och! are ye goin' up too?" asked Greg. He looked a trifle flushed and uneasy, and the glance he gave at Martin was suspicious and at the same time self-assertive.

"Yes, I am. Good night," said Martin curtly. He dared not stay alone with Greg at that moment.

XVII. THE MEANS OF ASCENDANCY.

I

MARTIN had expected that Greg's return to the City would induce again the former morning rush and urgency; but although some of the ritual remained, it was all so leisurely and deliberate that it evoked none of the old feeling.

Greg had his breakfast in bed; but he was in the study fully dressed by a quarter-past nine.

Martin was still resentful, still burning to know why Margaret had cried out the night before, but he had himself in hand this morning. He had long days ahead of him and he was progressing steadily towards an intention to win Margaret's confidence.

He tried to speak in his ordinary voice, as he wished his collaborator "Good morning."

Greg nodded carelessly. "How long have ye been here now, Bond?" he asked unexpectedly, and Martin felt a sudden tremor run through him. He had almost forgotten that he might be dismissed at an hour's notice.

"A month last Saturday, wasn't it?" he said with a decent imitation of indifference.

"Is that all?" asked Greg with genuine surprise. "Eh! well, I've never paid ye yer salary, but I'll cash a cheque in the City to-day and let ye have it to-night."

"Really, it doesn't matter," said Martin. "I would so very much sooner you didn't pay me a salary, I mean. I feel that now you have made me a collaborator in the book, you see . . . It was so awfully good of you." Inwardly he was apostrophizing himself for the ineptitude of his reply; it all sounded so cold and unconvincing. A week ago, he could have spoken with warmth and feeling.

Greg was bending over the newly-lighted fire, warming his hands.

"I did not think ye were such a fool, Bond," he remarked drily.

"Such a fool as to refuse money?" asked Martin, with a flash of temper.

"Aye! that and other things," was the quiet response.

"I don't know what other things you're specially referring to," returned Martin, "although I am quite aware that I am a fool in many ways; but as to the money, I should have thought that you would have understood that I didn't want paying for anything I've done here."

Greg nodded. "Ye do well to remind me of it," he said, "but I'm sorry that ye should take the tone ye have with me. It's not friendly, to say the least of it."

Martin's temper cooled instantly. "I'm sorry," he said. "I daresay I am a bit touchy about money matters. After all, I'm living here free of cost—surely that and my share in the book is payment enough."

Greg did not reply. He still bent over the fire, warming his hands. His face wore a look of intensity and speculation, as if he were debating some essential problem. But if he was thus absorbed, he gave no expression to his difficulty then. Instead, he looked at his watch and got up with some remark as to the time. "Ye might just put together the manuscript of that last chapter of mine," he said, as he was leaving the room. "I'll maybe find time to go over it in the office after lunch."

As Martin found the required papers—he was always neat and methodical in his care of such things—he determined to be quite firm in his refusal of any salary; he would have liked to pay for his board and lodging, but did not quite dare to make that suggestion. He meant, nevertheless, to settle the smaller question at once, but when he went out into the hall with the manuscript he found Margaret there, assisting in the more

dignified ritual which now preceded the morning's departure.

Greg took the papers and pocketed them without comment, and, after a moment's hesitation, Martin returned to the study.

A minute later he heard the front door shut, not as before with a slam, but firmly, deliberately. And Greg had a full twelve minutes for his walk to the station.

"In effect, that difference is part of my work," thought Martin. "It would never have been done without me. Surely if there is any obligation it's not on my side."

He wondered if he would see Margaret before lunch, and if she would sing to him in the afternoon. He wondered, also, if she would give him any confidence.

This was only the first day. And for the next three months they would be virtually alone in the house together, five days out of seven, from half-past nine to six o'clock. In that time they must come to know each other better, to become friends, to arrive at an intimacy that would allow him to proffer her a more helpful service. He was sure that she was not happy. And why had she cried out in the hall last night? . . .

Presently he became aware of an extraordinary peace and quietness about the house. It all seemed wonderfully clean and empty.

Garroch was nodding again.

2

But no promise of a closer friendship with Margaret rewarded Martin that day.

She did not come into the study before lunch. It was a bright clear morning, and he heard her go out with Biddie a little before eleven and she did not return till after one. Lunch time was occupied by Biddie's account of the morning excursion to the shops in her mailcart, a tedious history in which Margaret took an unac-

countable interest. And when the nurse came in to carry Biddie upstairs for her afternoon sleep, Margaret got up also.

"Shall I see you this afternoon?" asked Martin in desperation as she was going out.

"No, I'm afraid not," she said formally. "I'm going out to tea with some friends of mine in town. I don't suppose I shall be back until after six. You'll have your walk, of course," she added rather inconsequently as she left him.

It was after seven, however, before she returned, and Greg came in with her. Their conversation over the dinner table made it clear that she had telephoned to him and afterwards joined him at his office. Martin tried to persuade himself that she had been anxious about Robin on this first day of his return to the anxieties and, for him, peculiar temptations of the City; but he had a persistent, harrassing doubt that she was, also, trying to avoid his own company.

That doubt was confirmed as the days passed. He saw less of her, now, than ever before since he had been in the house. She was out every afternoon, Biddie was always with them at lunch, and on Wednesday and Thursday mornings Margaret did not come down to breakfast.

Martin found no cause for happiness in his contemplation of Margaret's new coldness towards himself. His anxious thought of her was always associated, he believed, with the ideal of friendship. She was still raised for him above the common level of humanity, and he was sometimes ashamed of those brief daring imaginations of his that had held him on the night of her engagement to Greg.

For two days, he made no attempt to break through her reserve; but when she did not come down to breakfast again on Thursday morning, he began to cherish a feeling of resentment; he wanted to retaliate for her neglect of him.

The means for such retaliation presented no difficulties. If she avoided him, she appeared no less anxious to avoid being alone with her fiancé. They still said their good night in the hall, but since Sunday that brief *tête-à-tête* of theirs had been even shorter than before. Martin saw that an opportunity for revenge was always open to him, and considered it with a certain bitter pleasure that was not without a spice of cruelty.

He put his plan into action on Friday morning, by asking if he might be absent himself that evening. He would like to go to a theatre, he said.

"Ye're finding it a bit dull, I'm afraid," said Greg. "Eh! well, I'm not surprised. Of course ye can go, I'll maybe be late myself to-night." He was warming himself at the study fire preparatory to putting on his overcoat, and he rubbed his hands together with a certain gusto as if he were looking forward to his overtime in the City.

"Thanks," replied Martin, and added, "Things going all right in Eastcheap?"

Greg's face fell a little. "Och! I can hardly say yet," he said, and went on quickly to ask what play Martin was going to see.

3.

At lunch, Martin announced his intention to Margaret.

He had hesitated during the morning, uncertain whether he would not be consistently brutal and leave her without any warning of his proposed absence. He relented at the last moment—the nurse might be expected for Biddie at any minute—because he could not, he found, cherish resentment or any sort of enmity towards Margaret while he was in her presence.

"I'm afraid I shall be out to-night," he said, on a note of apology, opening the subject suddenly, with no least

reference to anything that had been said during the meal.

She looked at him without any show of feeling. "Really," she said. "Where are you going?"

"Oh! a theatre, I think," returned Martin. "I—I feel I want a little excitement."

She was about to answer him when the nurse came and interrupted further conversation.

Martin wondered whether his scheme had not proved a complete failure. Margaret had shown no signs of displeasure at his announcement, nor did she make any attempt to see him again before he went out. And with the sense of failure his jealousy of Greg was momentarily revived.

As he walked down to the station Martin was full of bitterness, debating again the advisability of leaving Garroch at the earliest possible opportunity. There seemed to be so little reason why he should stay . . .

The weather served his mood. The frost had given way, and a south-west wind had brought a persistent rain. Everything about him seemed weary and sodden; the half-built, ill-lighted road that led to the station was utterly gloomy and forbidding. Few of the houses were let, the path, still unpaved at one end, was sticky with heavy clay, and the old estate on the other side of the road—already advertised as "a desirable building site"—looked like a shabby aristocrat fallen into low company.

Martin shuddered with disgust at the thought that he would have to pass through this road again on his way back to Garroch.

A desire for light, warmth and excitement possessed him when he was in the train, and he decided that he would give up the theatre and go to a music-hall. He did not want to sit in darkness staring at a false presentation of life on the stage; he wanted the warmth of human companionship.

But long before the evening was over, Garroch was calling to him again. All the noise and movement of

the music-hall became no less unreal to him than the mechanism of a stage play would have been. He was out of touch with all these people, they had no part in his life; they could laugh at the sight of simulated drunkenness and that fact alone utterly separated them from him. For to Martin the sight was suddenly repulsive. Every gesture of the comedian's all too admirable imitation recalled that first desperate week in Demetrius Road; and the experience came back with a new horror, as of something obscene that had once moved about the house.

He could not remain in his seat, but when he went out to the promenade the same cause for disgust was presented in another aspect. He saw a pale-faced, overdressed youth leering vacuously at a barmaid, he heard the shrill, excited laugh of a woman; all around him was the temptation to find a spurious exhilaration by the means of alcohol.

It was not yet ten o'clock, but Martin could stand the place no longer; it was all horrible to him, all false and unclean. His life and work lay in one curiously isolated house in that distant suburb, and until his work there was done, he could enter into no communication with the world outside. Every one was cut off from him, he had alienated Waterhouse, Forman, even, perhaps, his friend at the Settlement. And they were all of no account. He was circumscribed by the interests of that one tiny group of people; and all the rest of life was no more than a vision of dissociated phenomena.

It was hardly eleven o'clock when he reached Garroch, but all the lights were out. He let himself in quietly with the latch-key Greg had lent him, bolted the front door, and went straight up to his own room.

He wondered how the other two had spent their evening; and realized with a shock of surprise that during the past five hours his thoughts had been occupied with the well-being of Greg not less than with the protection of Margaret.

And when he woke on Saturday morning, his first thought was still of Robin; a thought that greeted him as with a message of escape from the long conflict of uncertainty. Here was a plain way for him, he believed, an issue to which he must abide. He had thought too much and too selfishly of Margaret, he had inclined always to put her so unquestionably first in his regard, that his real duty had been overlooked. Now he would devote himself and his sympathies to Robin Greg, and that devotion would instantly clear the situation. There could be no fear that he would ever come to regard Margaret as the "enemy." By this means he would achieve that unity he had so often desired. The three of them would at last be in sympathy.

So strong was his conviction of the virtue in this solution that already he felt easier in his mind, he was at once uplifted and content. He savoured the taste of renunciation and found comfort in it. And the method was as obvious as the solution itself; for every speech and action must express with divine inevitableness the nature of his thought. He had but to devote himself inwardly to Greg, and all divisions and dissensions would fade away.

He pondered his heaven-sent inspiration over his lonely breakfast. He was already set on the serving of Greg, on finally delivering him from the horror of all that had been distantly presented by the vision of the music hall.

This new attitude was at once made visible in the brief interval that elapsed between Greg's appearance in the study and his departure for the City.

Since that brief passage of arms on Monday morning a slight coolness had marked their intercourse. The question of salary had been decided, and on either side there had been signs of a new assumption in their

relations. Martin's new position as an almost unpaid collaborator was differentiated from that of the pound-a-week secretary. The discussions relating to the detail of the book had been more that of equals, and Martin unconsciously had shown a tendency to pay less deference to his collaborator's opinions.

This morning he struck a note of greater humility from the outset.

"What would you like me to do this morning, sir?" he asked, when Greg came in as usual to warm his hands.

Greg looked at him quizzically. "Ye can drop the 'sir' now, Bond," he said good-humouredly. "We're partners. Ye'd best call me just 'Greg,' I'm thinkin'."

Martin flushed. "All right. Thanks. If I may," he said. "Only I wanted to apologize . . . I'm afraid I . . ."

"Och! don't blether!" Greg interrupted. "D'ye think I cannot understand? I was twenty-three myself not so many years ago and I've not forgotten it."

"You've been frightfully decent to me," muttered Martin.

"I only wish to the devil I had not all this infernal worry over the business," said Greg. "Ye see, I'm sometimes half mad with it all. Eh! well, maybe I'll bring off this Dutch business, and then I'll be able to split with Andrews."

He sighed, got out of his chair and moved towards the door, then he hesitated a moment, returned to the hearth-rug and stood with his back to the fire.

"There's just one thing, Bond," he said, smiling rather self-consciously. "I know it's difficult for ye, but if ye could manage to leave me and Maggie alone rather more, I'd be grateful. I don't want ye to put yourself about in any way, but it has seemed to me at times as if ye were almost afraid to leave the room when we've been here alone together."

"Oh! I'm sorry. I wasn't conscious of it," said Martin, blushing furiously. "Of course I will."

"Thank ye," said Greg, with an unusual warmth in

his tone. "Eh! well, I must be off," he went on. "I'd be glad if ye'd look over what I've done in the office this week. Ye'll find the papers in the drawer there."

5

Sitting quietly in the study after the closing of the front door had brought to Garroch its daily sense of stillness and rest, Martin realized that his new programme might require of him a greater need for renunciation than he had anticipated. He was to leave them alone together. He had promised that in his eagerness without any thought of what Margaret might wish. And if he was to persist in his plan—so obvious and admirable a plan it still seemed to him—he must make up his mind to ignore absolutely and without a qualm, any indication of Margaret's, even such a strange appeal as that she had made by raising her voice in protest against—he faced it, now, deliberately—against a caress she shrank from. Last Sunday he had been hot with rage at the thought; this morning he was re-acting to the snubbing—so he saw it—of the last six days. She had no need for him, and however childishly unconscious of his true feeling, he was resentful, bitter, willing to be cruel. He wanted truly enough to save Greg, but he wanted not less to hurt Margaret, as she had hurt him.

He shrugged his shoulders as he contemplated the picture of her distress, the lines of his mouth were straightened, his eyelids drooped, the youthfulness of his face was obscured, giving place to the mask of a resolute, self-centred man. One set of potentialities was suddenly figured in his expression, his face was that of the determined egoist . . .

If Margaret called to him, he decided, she would call in vain, and he settled down to work with a grim smile. He worked well that morning.

He hardly looked up, indeed, when Margaret came most unexpectedly into the study soon after twelve o'clock. His absorption was no part of his new plan, he thought she had come to look for a book, and he had no wish to risk a snubbing by offering to help her.

She came in and stood by the mantelpiece, and he started perceptibly when she said, "Am I interrupting you?"

He put down his pen and looked up at her. "No! I'm not particularly busy," he said. "I've been looking through the stuff Mr Greg has been doing at his office."

She took that up with a touch of eagerness. "Has he done much?" she asked.

"Yes, quite a lot, and rather good stuff, too," said Martin. "He must have wonderful powers of concentration to be able to write like that in an office with all the interruptions and worries and the rest of it."

"Oh! yes, he has," returned Margaret quickly. "He is very wonderful in some ways."

"Yes, in many ways," agreed Martin. He was wondering why she had come in; her coming certainly gave him opportunity to express his new attitude, but it was not the kind of opportunity he wanted.

"You are getting on very well with the book, aren't you?" she asked.

"Splendidly," replied Martin.

"When do you think it will be finished?"

"Possibly by the end of February."

"That's very quick, isn't it?"

"I suppose it is. You see, Mr Greg had the whole scheme so well thought out beforehand."

Margaret nodded appreciatively. "Yes, I know he had," she said, and then went on inconsequently. "What theatre did you go to last night? You were home very early."

It seemed that she had come in to gossip with him. Perhaps she felt that she had been too hard upon him during the week and now, safe in the foreknowledge o

Robin's presence for a day and a half, was willing to make some little amend for her disdain. Martin hardened his heart at the thought; he was not a child to be alternately punished and soothed.

"Oh! nothing at all interesting," he said casually. "I was home early because I came out before the show was over."

"Did you?" she said. "Was it so dull? We went to bed very early, too; at least I did, and I heard Robin come up soon afterwards."

He wondered, suddenly, if she had come to give him a hint that she did not want him to be out again in the evening, and he hugged the thought grimly.

"I'm afraid I'm horribly in your way sometimes," he said, with a daring that surprised himself. "I really went out last night chiefly to give you and Mr Greg an evening alone together."

"That was thoughtful of you," she said carelessly. "But I hope you won't go out specially for that reason. Really, you needn't."

No woman in her position could have said more or less, but Martin was suspicious.

"Oh! well," he said, "I like to go out sometimes, you know."

"It must be very dull for you, of course, cooped up here," she suggested.

"It is, rather," he agreed. "The days seem very long. You see, I haven't a soul to speak to between half-past nine and seven, and then, well, if you come to think of it, I am working about ten hours a day, and every day in the week, too."

She winced a little. "I hadn't thought of that," she began, and then added, "But I don't see how it can be helped."

"No?" he returned pointedly.

"How can it be?" she asked.

He shrugged his shoulders and looked down at the

manuscript on the table before him. "I wasn't dull the first week I was here," he said.

She turned her back on him then, and looked down into the fire, resting her forehead on the mantelpiece. "That first week was so different in every way," she said in a low voice.

He was bold now. He had already dared so much without rebuff.

"May I be quite frank, Miss Hamilton?" he asked, and then, as she did not answer, he said, "I can't help feeling that you have avoided me for some reason for the last few days. I haven't really the least idea why. I did understand, of course, that we couldn't talk about Mr Greg in the same way, about the cure and all that, I mean, after—after Christmas Eve. But I didn't see and I can't see now, either, why I should have been sent to Coventry. It would be quite different for me here, wouldn't it, if you could take some sort of an interest—not necessarily in me, I know there's no earthly reason why you should—but in the book, perhaps. I don't see why we couldn't talk about that sometimes, or some other subject—that isn't barred. And, well, if you could sing now and then, it would make a big difference, too. Do you know what I mean?"

"Very well," said Margaret quietly, without moving.

"I don't see any reason, either, why not."

"How can there be any reason?" he asked.

"No, how can there?" she repeated.

With every admission of hers, his courage increased.

"And it's not only for my sake, is it?" he asked.

She turned round and looked at him. "I don't quite understand . . ." she began, a little embarrassed by the directness of the gaze with which he met her.

"Well, I have done something for Mr Greg, haven't I?" he said. "And though I know quite well that it rests more with you than with me, now; I can still do a great deal."

"Oh! yes, I know," she said. She wanted to look

away, but his gaze was so frank and steady that it seemed an act of submission not to meet his eyes.

"And if I went away," he continued, "it would, I think, make a difference to him."

"Were you thinking of going away?" She was trying to protect herself, but she was suddenly weak and feeble. Martin was no longer a big, clean boy, but a strong, overbearing man. She knew that she would be able again to influence and rule him at her will, but at this moment he was stronger than she. It was as if he held her by the power of his physical strength.

"I shall certainly go if I have another week like this one," he said brutally, rejoicing in his advantage. He felt that he could order here or there as he willed; his spirit was exalted with the glow of victory.

"Oh! you must not leave us now," said Margaret, and with that surrender she released herself, too late, from the control of his steady eyes.

"I m-must see about lunch," she went on quickly, and she did not look up at him as he held the door open for her to go out.

When Martin sat down again to his desk he was thrilling with the joy of mastery, and even the thought of the promise he had made to Robin that morning did not subdue him. He was inclined to make light of it in that mood of exultation.

XVIII. THE DIVIDED HOUSE.

I

MARGARET'S ascendancy was soon re-asserted. That evening and all the next day Martin was split by his endeavour to keep unsoiled the spirit of both the signed and the unsigned treaties. He had pledged himself to Greg, and opened pourparlers with Margaret, against whom he was ostensibly acting; but he blindly believed that some compromise was still possible. What chiefly hindered him, he thought, was that despite the importance of his intermediacy, he was outside the secret confidence of either party. He was, indeed, quite uncertain whether they might not at any time act together against him. He had no idea how far they trusted him—or each other.

The straight issue of keeping his promise with Greg was, in some ways, simple enough, but in his eagerness to observe the letter of the agreement, Martin overlooked the necessity for finesse and drew down the reproof of his principal.

"Don't overdo it, laddie," Greg remarked caustically, when he and Martin were alone for a few minutes before supper on Sunday evening. And in answer to Martin's look of surprise he said, "Ye've been jumpin' out of yer chair all day like a pea in a fryin' pan whenever Maggie's come into the room."

The hoot with which he pointed this criticism hinted a touch of bitterness, as if Martin's too obvious display of tact had not been very successful.

"It's jolly difficult," mumbled Martin, a little piqued.

"Eh! well, I'm not blamin' ye, laddie. Ye've done yer best, no doubt, and played straight enough with me," said Greg kindly. "But for reasons I can't just

explain to ye now, it'll be better perhaps that ye sit quiet this evening."

And that night, for the first time, Robin said good night to Margaret in the study and did not afterwards accompany her out into the hall. The kiss they exchanged would not have excited the feelings of the most jealous lover; they might have been married for twenty dreary years.

But Margaret's ascendancy over Martin, if it was helped by the passage of a day's experience that definitely quelled his boast of Saturday morning, needed no assistance from outside in order to re-assert itself.

When the week-day peace once more wrapped Garroch in dreamy complacence, she took her own measures to establish her position as ruling power in the diminished household; and with a natural reaction after her subdual in the study, she went a little too far. This new intercourse after the inhibitions and depressions of the previous week, was such a relief to her; it all seemed so safe and innocent, and, above all, so necessary for the welfare of Robin.

2

At first he was not discussed between them; that was the explicitly forbidden topic, and neither of them recognized the significance of the ban. They had, it seemed, an all-sufficient reason for their silence, and both of them shirked the plain inference that Margaret's relation to Robin was not mentioned, because it would not bear examination by two people who might conceivably be none too anxious to admit its finality.

And partly because this one topic was avoided and the spirit of the house consequently defied, their conversation from the very beginning of the new agreement took a lighter tone. They played a game with super-

ficialities, and Martin's most earnest endeavour to strike a more serious note was invariably foiled by Margaret. If she wanted revenge she made the most of her opportunities; she rallied him on his lack of intuition, teased him in a manner slightly patronizing to his youth, a manner that gave him no encouragement to presume on his newly found intimacy. She was, he found, as distant as ever, although it was another fence that she had set up between them.

Even when she sang to him on Tuesday afternoon in the cold deserted drawing-room, she gave him no least chance to penetrate her new defences.

"Won't you sing 'Lochaber'?" he asked with great seriousness, when she had given him an example of what German training had done for her capacity to render some less complicated form of operatic firework.

"Oh! 'Lochaber'," she said with a laugh, imitating his English pronunciation of the name. "It sounds more dreary than ever that way."

"I know I can't pronounce it properly," he returned, "but won't you sing it?"

"Too depressing," she said lightly; "besides, I don't believe you can understand the language." And before he could protest she began to play a dance by Chamade.

"Yes, jolly," he said, when she had finished, "but I would sooner you sang."

"But I don't want to sing," she said, "and if you persist in 'glooming' I shall shut the piano and go up to play with Biddie."

"I'm sorry," he said. "Don't do that, anyway. Go on playing—anything."

"Hardly complimentary, that," she remarked. "It sounds as if you thought my playing no better than my singing."

"Oh! but . . ." he began eagerly.

"I haven't forgotten your utter surprise when I told you that I had had my voice trained," she interrupted

him. She had entire control of the situation, his protest was drowned at once by a further sample of dance music.

Martin tried to adapt himself to this persistently maintained mood of hers. He had become dimly aware that she was deliberately keeping him at a distance, but he took no more comfort from that attitude than he had from her former disdain of him. He fumbled for an explanation and could only hit upon the probability that she did not trust him and was anxious to avoid any approach to serious discussion. As an explanation, that appeared sufficient to account for the facts, but it brought no consolation. If he could not define his desires, he was quite sure that this last manner of Margaret's did not satisfy him. Nevertheless, he tried honestly to fit his humour to hers.

She might, perhaps, have continued in it for some time longer, if the spirit of the house, so strangely outraged by this flouting of essentials, had not reasserted itself on Thursday night.

3

Martin was an accessory, and thought himself a principal.

He left the study at half-past eight, ostensibly to write letters in the dining-room. Neither of the other two spoke any word to prevent his going, but Margaret looked keenly at him when he announced his intention.

He found the dining-room fire too far gone for any remedy less drastic than paper and sticks, but the room was quite warm and he settled himself down to write his letters, with the feeling of one aware that he waited for interruption.

He had come there less to fulfil his promise than to make experiment. His former implicit threat to leave Garroch unless Margaret would take more notice of

him, had proved partly successful. He wanted, now, both to define the cause of her fear and to renew the threat without childishly repeating it.

He had not long to wait for the first evidence of some result. Before he had been writing half an hour, he heard a distant confusion of raised voices in the study, followed by the opening and shutting of the door, and the sound of Margaret's footsteps running upstairs—the door had been shut, he thought, with unnecessary vigour.

He half closed his eyes and listened with all his attention, but perfect silence had succeeded the brief clamour. The tick of the marble clock on the mantelpiece suddenly presented itself to him as something delicately stertorous.

For some minutes he sat still, moodily trying to account for Margaret's behaviour, and then failing most completely to find any solution, he returned to his interrupted correspondence.

Margaret did not go back to the study, and shortly before ten o'clock Greg came out and locked the front door. When that was done he came into the dining-room.

"Have ye not finished yet?" he asked.

"Oh! just about," said Martin. "Are you going to bed?"

"Are ye comin' back into the study?" asked Greg, glancing up at the ceiling. Martin remembered that Margaret's bedroom was over the dining-room—he had heard no sound from her since she had gone upstairs.

"Yes, I'll come now, if you like," he said, gathering up his writing materials.

"It's just this," began Greg, as soon as they were settled in the study, "I'm not quite easy in my mind about Maggie."

"Oh!" ejaculated Martin, a little startled, "Why? What's the matter?"

"She's a wee bit nervous and upset altogether," said

Greg thoughtfully. "If it weren't for this damned Bill that ought to have been passed fifty years since, we'd get married at once and put an end to a rather difficult situation. But, ye see, that's out of the question, and we won't know till February whether the Bill will be down for the next Session, though I've little doubt of it, myself. However, the point is that I think, under the circumstances, it would be better if Maggie went home to her mother in Scotland for a while—she's in a false situation here. We've said nothing to her mother as yet, ye see, for if we did the old lady'd be down here by the next train. She'd not agree to Maggie's being alone in the house with me, ye understand."

"Yes; of course, I see," mumbled Martin. He felt cold and sick at the thought of his probable future in that house, with Margaret in Scotland.

"Well, the trouble is that Maggie'll not hear of goin' away. Ye can guess her reasons. She has a great heart, has Maggie, and she thinks with my business troubles and all that, I'll maybe get low-spirited if she's away." He paused for a moment and then looked up at Martin. "D'ye think ye could persuade her?" he asked.

"Me? No, I don't think—I'm sure I couldn't," said Martin. "She wouldn't attach the least importance to anything I could say."

"Ye underrate yer influence with her, I fancy," replied Greg, returning to his earnest contemplation of the dying fire. "She's a great opinion of ye, I gather."

"Oh! really, I don't think so," remonstrated Martin, getting very red. "I don't think she ever gives me a thought."

Greg fidgeted in his chair. "Are ye very clever, Bond, or a born fool?" he asked.

"A bit of a fool, I'm afraid," said Martin, uncomfortably.

"I'm inclined to believe ye," said Greg, and hooted gently. "However," he went on quickly. "I wish ye'd try and persuade her to go home for a while. I want ye

to point out that ye're fully capable of looking after me. I'll have ye up in the office with me every day—there's a table in my room ye can work at—we'll be more than David and Jonathan; I'll make a Siamese twin of ye for the time bein', if that'll satisfy her."

Martin was thinking that his own satisfaction was an entirely negligible factor in this proposal. "Very well," he said quietly, "I'll see what I can do." But at that moment he was doubtful of his own sincerity. He felt that whatever happened he could not let Margaret go.

Greg smiled grimly. "Ye've not been engaged, yourself, have ye?" he asked.

"No."

"Nor been in love, maybe?"

"In a way, I have." Martin was thinking of that first despicable affair of his. He did not count it, now; he had new ideals about love, but some instinct prompted him to make more of it on this occasion.

"What way?" asked Greg caustically, and he turned and looked Martin full in the eyes.

"Oh! well, there was a woman . . ." he began.

"I inferred that much," said Greg with a hoot.

"And, well, I suppose I was in love with her for a time," stammered Martin. He hated this confession, it made him feel false to Margaret and unworthy of her; but Greg's eyes were searching him, and instinct counselled deception.

"How long did it last?" was the next question.

"A month or two."

"Did she give ye up or did ye grow tired of her?"

"She gave me up." It was certainly half the truth.

"And ye were broken-hearted for a time, I suppose?"

Martin nodded. That affirmative seemed less compromising than a direct lie in words.

"Did ye not try to console yourself?"

"No. No, I didn't." Martin was glad to find himself stating an unqualified truth.

"How long ago was all this?"

"About a year," Martin said, halving the period for no particular reason.

"Eh, well," remarked Greg, relapsing into his chair. "I just asked ye because ye might be better able to understand how I feel about this business with Maggie. However, ye've helped me so far, and I'll look to ye to persuade her to leave this house for a while." He paused and then added, "I trust ye, laddie, ye understand that?"

"I hope so," returned Martin feebly.

Before they went to bed, they further discussed the possibility of Martin's working in the office. The plan seemed quite practicable.

4

But no suggestion could have appeared more dismal to Martin than this with which he was now faced, to which he was made a party. He admitted his dismay while he strove to find consolation in his regard of duty. He pictured with repulsive clearness his life for the next two months, and realized with a certain sinking of heart that the joy would be gone out of his care for Greg, when Margaret had left them. Yet he would not admit to himself that there was any alternative. He recognized his ethical duty, and if he approached it with shrinking and distaste he had not the least intention of shirking it. He liked Greg, liked him immensely—so he phrased the feeling in his thoughts—and he tried honestly enough to regard him as the only factor of importance. So far, he thought with a throb of self-congratulation, he had no cause to blame himself; he had been trusted and he had been worthy of trust.

Nevertheless, the contemplation of that promised talk with Margaret wore an aspect that was almost thrilling. He would be able to read her secret intention. Without any thrusting forward of his own claims to

consideration, he would be able to probe her hidden desires in this matter. He could be reserved, detached; he held a brief for a third party, and he would figure as the unemotional instrument. This was a new part for him to play; a few weeks earlier he would have disdained it as unworthy; but the intrigues of Garroch had had their effect upon him, and still more had he been influenced by his thwarted, inhibited love for Margaret. He had been wound in a net of ethical motives, reasons for self-restraint that had seemed inoppugnable, and the effect had been to sour him rather than to strengthen him in virtue. His exercise in right conduct—judged by the conventional standard—had developed in him on that side nothing more than an artificial and finally worthless sense of duty. On the other side strange vices were growing to balance his intrinsically spurious altruism, a tendency towards cruelty, a tendency towards disingenuousness.

He had more time than he required in which to plan his attack, for Margaret put in no appearance on Friday, either at breakfast, or—and this was hitherto unprecedented—at lunch. When he returned to the study, Martin began to doubt whether he would see her at all that day. He was bitterly disappointed. He had been looking forward to this serious conversation with her; he wanted to arrive at an understanding both of her future intentions and of her dislike to being left alone with her fiancé. He thought that this one talk must necessarily resolve all his doubts. He gave little thought, at that moment, to the effect this interview might have upon the future relations of the three persons so inextricably concerned; he believed that he wanted only—as he put it—to understand.

So he chafed and fidgeted, and considered the possibility of sending a message by Hester. After all he had a definite mission, specific instructions to fulfil. A command would almost have been justified.

And then, when he had nearly given up hope, she

came without any message; she walked into the study wearing that long coat and fur toque in which he had first seen her, and commanded him.

"I am going out for a walk," she said. "Will you come, too? We can't talk in this house." She seemed to know that he had instructions to deliver. She looked tired and rather pale.

"I should love to come," Martin said with alacrity. This was better than he had hoped. He saw that what she had said was perfectly true although he had never before realized it—they couldn't talk in that house.

5

They took the shortest road out of the suburb; through the village that, encrusted as it was with the bright prolific fungus of villadom, still maintained something of its original air; like an old, old woman surrounded by a crowd of uncomprehending, precocious grandchildren—and so into the lane that winds up the hill to the quiet spaces of the high common.

Until they came into the lane they walked in silence. The day was overcast and the air mild and damp, but no rain was falling as yet.

Martin was the first to speak. He fell back upon the usual resort and made some remark upon the weather.

Margaret did not seem to hear him. "Did he tell you that he wants me to go to Scotland?" she asked abruptly.

"Yes, last night after you had gone to bed," said Martin.

"What did he say?"

"Oh! that he thought you were rather nervous and upset, something like that, and that you didn't want to go, and he thought it was probably because you didn't trust him—in that particular way, you know. And he suggested that I should go and work with him in the

office—on the book, of course; he said that we'd be like Siamese twins."

"Was that all?"

"Practically."

"Why did he ask *you* to tell me all this?"

"I have absolutely no idea." Martin felt that the conversation was not going as he had planned, but he hoped that the essential part was still to come.

"How did you know all about it?" he asked.

She laughed, a hard thin little laugh that held no amusement. "Do you think I don't know Robin?" she said, and then went on, "But I wish you would tell me more of what he said. You were in the study a long time."

"Oh! well," Martin hesitated, trying to recall what he supposed were the important points of the conversation; "we discussed my working in the office, and he said a good deal about it's being best for you to go home for a bit . . ."

"Yes, yes, that doesn't matter," she broke in impatiently. "Didn't he explain in any way why he asked *you* to tell me this?"

"No." He had no intention of repeating that suggestion of his influence with her; largely, perhaps, because he did not himself believe it.

"And you didn't infer it?"

"No."

"Didn't he ask you any questions about yourself?"

"Oh! yes, by the way, I'd forgotten that." Martin was struck by a memory of that strange cross-questioning. "Yes, he did. He asked me if—if I'd ever—ever been in love. Funny thing to ask, wasn't it?"

She did not answer his question. Her attention had apparently been given to the state of the roads. "I think it's rather drier on the other side," she remarked with a sudden show of interest in this new subject. "Shall we cross over?"

The lane was rutted and muddy, and the crossing occupied their attention for a few seconds. When they

were safe on the other side, which was certainly drier, she took up the conversation again by asking,

"Well, and have you?"

Martin had lost the context. "Have I what?" he asked.

"Ever been in love," she prompted him carelessly.

"Didn't you say that Robin asked you that?"

"Oh! yes, of course he did," said Martin. This question coming from Margaret was not to be put off as Greg's examination had been. "I told him—I said I had."

"Recently?" She put the question as if she had no least interest in his answer. He looked at her and she met his glance without hesitation. "How slow you are," she said. "What did you tell him?"

"Well, there was some sort of affair I had, a few years ago," stammered Martin, looking down at the path. "I was only a kid, of course, and there was never anything in it, really; I mean that I thought I cared at the time . . ."

"Did you tell Robin all that?" she asked.

"Something like that."

"Nothing else?"

"I hadn't anything else to tell him, at least, nothing I could have told *him*."

"Goodness!" commented Margaret, and added, "It isn't the things you *think* you say that matter when you're talking to Robin."

"Oh! Lord," said Martin in sudden despair. "How on earth is one to avoid that sort of thing? It's perfectly dreadful not to be able to have a thought to oneself."

She laughed a little, with more amusement this time. "Poor little boy," she said with mock pity.

"I'm not a boy," said Martin desperately. "If you only knew . . ."

"Then there are some thoughts that you've kept hidden?" she said.

"I don't know," he grumbled. "I don't see that one can be held responsible for one's thoughts."

They had come up on to the common now, but there was no view from there on that heavy afternoon. London, as represented by the suburb out of which they had come, was shut out by the gloomy haze that enshrouded it.

"Which way shall we go?" asked Margaret, disregarding his last protest.

"I don't care," he replied. Margaret took the road to the right, and they walked on for a few minutes without speaking.

"All this is very interesting to you, Miss Hamilton," said Martin at last—he had been pondering a frontal attack in the interval—"but it seems to me that we haven't discussed the important point at all yet."

"Well?" she prompted him, as he waited for her to answer this challenge.

"I mean the point of whether you are going away or not, and whether you can trust me now to look after Mr Greg by myself."

"Oh! that's the important part, is it?" she asked.

"Isn't it?"

"It seems to me," she said, "that the important point is *why* I should go away."

"Because you're not well." The answer was so obvious, he thought.

"But I am," she said.

"Are you?"

"Perfectly."

"But then why . . ."

"Exactly," she said. "That was *my* point."

"Oh! Lord, I can't understand it at all," groaned Martin. "Couldn't you explain it to me, some of it, anyway? Or am I too young to be trusted?"

"You certainly are very young," she said.

"Don't chaff me," he pleaded earnestly. "I simply can't bear it this afternoon."

She made a gesture of impatience. "Why *do* you want everything in black and white?" she asked.

" Haven't I told you enough already? Can't you fill in the gaps for yourself? "

" I didn't know that you'd told me anything," he said. " So far as I am concerned it's all gap at present. He asked me last night if I knew what a born fool I was. I suppose I am. I wish you would take that for granted. Couldn't you? "

She did not answer him at once. For a minute or two they tramped in silence along the heavy road across the common. A soft thin rain was beginning to fall, shutting out the nearer distances. Martin was walking with his head down; he was thinking that all his scheme of diplomacy had come to nothing; he had found that he could not be disingenuous out there in those open spaces alone with Margaret.

She was facing the fine rain as if she liked it. Her hands were tucked into the pockets of her travelling coat; she walked as if she could never be physically tired.

6

" I don't get out enough," she said at last. " That's all that's the matter with me. No wonder I get nerves cooped up in *that* house. In Scotland I often walk twenty miles in the day."

Martin felt that his opportunity had slipped from him. " Why don't you go out more? " he asked.

" I always go out in the morning with Biddie," she said, " and I feel that it isn't worth while, afterwards, to go out again by myself."

" And I suppose you wouldn't care to come out with me in the afternoon? " he asked.

" One might as well do that as stay in the house," she said.

" Much better," he suggested.

" Oh! dear," she said impatiently, " do try not to be so literal."

Martin thought over her former remark, but could find no hidden meaning in it. "Must you talk in riddles?" he asked.

"What is it you want to know?" she said, turning and looking at him. "Aren't you talking in riddles, too?"

"I want to know," he said, "whether you are going back to Scotland, for one thing?"

"I don't want to," she said, and then added, "If I do, I shall take Biddie with me."

He did not see the force of her qualification. "What has Biddie to do with it?" he asked.

"Is that your second question," she said. "I've answered 'one thing' to the best of my ability."

"No! never mind about Biddie," returned Martin. "I don't think she has much to do with it. The other thing I want to know is why you . . . whether you . . . it's about this engagement . . . did you, I mean . . ." He sighed and gave it up. He could not dare the direct question. "Don't you know what I mean?" he concluded in despair.

"He won't be safe for months and months yet," Margaret said, staring straight ahead of her. "And I feel, you feel it too, that that is the one really important thing. I would do *almost* anything to get him quite well again. I suppose it can't mean as much to you as it does to me; it isn't possible it should. It's part of my life. I've been mixed up with it all from the beginning. I must go on. I daren't risk anything. I *am* going on. I'm not going away. I'm going to try not to be so squeamish and . . . and silly . . . I can't trust him alone with you; certainly not just now when he's so worried about his business. You don't know how weak he can be. He must be made happy, but if only . . ." She broke off with a long sigh, and then went on. "I think your suggestion is rather a good one. We'll go out for walks every afternoon. It is all clean and fresh and open up here. Shall we?"

"Yes, rather," agreed Martin warmly. He thought that he knew now all that he had wanted to know. "It's all so different away from the house," he added.

"It isn't really," she said. "We'll have to take the house with us. Hadn't we better be going back?"

The rain was coming down in earnest now, and a little wind had risen that faced them when they turned. And whether because conversation was made more difficult by the rain that drove in their faces, or because they had nothing more to say to each other at that time, hardly another word passed between them until they had reached the gate of Garroch.

"We shan't be able to come out to-morrow," Martin said, as he held the gate open for her.

"Nor Sunday," she added.

"No, but you'll come again on Monday?" he said, as he let the gate bang behind them.

She did not reply to that.

Martin felt a shudder of disgust run through him as they stood side by side at the front door, waiting for Hester to let them in. He realized suddenly that he hated Garroch.

XIX. THE "LOST" WALK.

I

MARTIN did not learn directly what arguments Margaret used to dissuade Robin from his project.

Greg was late that evening—they kept dinner waiting for him—and he had no opportunity, even if he desired one, to ask Martin if his ambassadorship had been successful. But Margaret sat up that night after Martin had gone to his room—he did not attempt to undress until he heard her come upstairs an hour later—and Greg made no further reference afterwards to his request that Martin should use his, inferentially powerful, influence.

Whatever she had said had an effect not only upon Robin but, also, upon the general atmosphere of the house over the week-end. The breach that had threatened to open between Robin and Martin was temporarily bridged. They were on better terms with each other and with their work than they had been during the past few days. And Greg himself was in better spirits. He chaffed both Martin and Margaret, displayed a greater optimism about his business affairs, and played hymns enthusiastically for Biddie on Sunday afternoon.

Martin responded as cheerfully as he was able to these evidences of greater serenity within the divided house. He appreciated the fact that here were all the signs of that unanimity he had once so earnestly desired, and tried to persuade himself that this agreement was all he could ever hope for, that it represented his ultimate ambition for the household.

Nevertheless, he was not content. Something within him chafed at the restraint of that week-end. He exam-

ined his mind and could, or would, find no cause for his feeling of unrest and dissatisfaction. He assured himself that he was not looking forward to the relief of Monday and the necessary absence of one member of the theoretically united trio; and sought explanation for his inward sense of discontent in the fact that he was not taking enough exercise. In his solitary analysis of the position, he was much inclined to give extraordinary value to facts during that time; they represented a firm and undeniable basis for argument, he thought. He was, indeed, vaguely aware, both in himself and in the influence of Garroch, of something indefinite and yet more inclusive, that was the cause of all the little phenomena he classified and examined; but he could not reach it by any induction, and expended some energy in denying its existence. His attitude in that denial, was, perhaps, sufficiently logical; if he could not understand this strange, all-powerful influence, it was better to assume himself mistaken in hypothecating it.

By Monday morning he was quite certain that he, at least, was in no way affected by anything but lack of exercise; and he wondered how far Margaret would be able to walk that afternoon.

Nothing more had been said as to that plan of going out together. He had anticipated Margaret's purpose on this occasion without question, and was justified in the event. He did not guess how many times she had changed her mind, in the interval between Friday and Monday . . .

2

Their first afternoons were splendidly commonplace. They were still under the influence of the week-end, full of resolution to make their intercourse detached and impersonal. On Wednesday, however, they lapsed for a time into talk of Robin. The subject was an ever-present temptation. It continually pressed itself upon

them, and other subjects were discussed with a purely surface interest. They told each other of incidents in their lives with the consciousness that such stories were foolishly unimportant. And when Margaret slipped into a story connected with Robin's engagement to her sister, a new zest entered into them; they were like bored children coming out into the playground after a long morning in the schoolroom.

The next day they spoke of him more openly, and on Friday Margaret said that she saw no reason why they should not talk about him.

"You said that we must take the house with us," agreed Martin.

"And he *is* the house," returned Margaret.

That afternoon Robin figured as the excuse for their walk. They talked of his past only, and never approached any criticism of him. He was set up between them as a symbol to guard their honour.

Then came the interlude of another week-end.

Greg was still cheerful. The Dutch business was almost settled. "If I can hang on for another six weeks," he said, "I'll be on my feet again." His health, however, was giving them some cause for anxiety. He looked run down, and his appetite was not good. He stayed in bed until lunch-time on Sunday morning.

3

And it was the subject of Robin's health that led them on another step when they went for their walk on Monday afternoon. The force that was slowly to break down all their suppressions was thrusting them still inevitably forward. They could not avoid talk of Robin, and when they came to speech of his present condition, the end was already in sight. For the thing they were craving to discuss was his influence upon them and not as they always pretended, both to each other and themselves, their power to influence him.

By Wednesday afternoon only one revelation remained to be made, the final topic towards which they had from the beginning been impelled. Even then they pretended most valiantly that that final topic would never be approached.

Martin still had a wonderful faith in his own integrity, he believed he was walking on firm ground while he was being whirled through the air, one fragile little seed caught up by the breath of the increasing gale.

There was a moment on that Wednesday afternoon, however, when he recognized that his hold of earth was not too sure.

They had been talking of the cure, and Margaret had led him on to self-revelation.

"I felt at that time," he said, "that his cure was the only thing that mattered. I was awfully glad and proud about it."

"You were splendid," Margaret agreed.

"Oh! and you too," he protested.

She let that pass. "But aren't you just as glad and proud now?" she asked.

"Yes, oh! yes, of course I am," he said.

"But it isn't *quite* the same?"

"Why do you say that?"

"I feel that there's a difference."

He felt it no less strongly and tried to explain it away.

"Well, there must be, I suppose, in some ways," he said, looking very brave and determined. "After the thing is done, one can't keep up quite the same pitch of enthusiasm about it. He's on his own feet, now . . ."

"Is he?" she put in quietly.

"Not altogether, perhaps," he admitted, anxious to continue his self-convincing argument, "but relatively. We don't have to attack him, now, in the same way. At first it was a big issue, and we had to concentrate on it for all we were worth; whereas, now, we only have to keep the thing going."

"*You* do," said Margaret unwisely.

"Does it mean more than that to you?" he asked.

The necessity for confidence was strong upon her that afternoon; she had suffered almost more than she could bear lately.

"I think that this is the hardest part of all," she said, turning her face away from him.

Martin saw the danger ahead and moved a step nearer to investigate it. "I *do* know, partly," he said, "at least, I guess; only I felt I couldn't say anything to you about that."

She wanted his strength and support, and ventured a little further. "I wonder if you *do* guess," she said.

"*Must* you sit up with him?" he blurted out. "I don't believe you dislike it more than I do. I never go to bed until I hear you come up."

"I know," she said. Her face was still turned away from him, but he could see the colour in her cheek.

"Would you sooner I didn't?"

She shook her head and then went on quickly. "It's all p-perfectly absurd, I admit. It's only because I'm still a bit shaky after last summer. And I *would* go away for a time as he suggested, only I know it isn't safe to leave him, yet."

Martin frowned. "I wish you would go away," he said.

"I can't go yet." She looked at him now with a frown of perplexity. "Really you don't quite understand him. He tells me things that he would never tell you."

"But he wanted you to get away a fortnight ago," He saw the blush spring up in her face again, and she bent her head down to hide it.

"He was silly about something, then," she said.

"Would it be better if *I* went?" asked Martin suddenly.

She knew that it would be better, but she could not face that house alone with Robin. She was afraid and Martin was her only defence. She trusted him and relied upon him. She knew that he was utterly hers and utterly faithful. Once he had commanded her and she knew

that in some respects he was stronger than she; but she could never fear him as she sometimes, so horribly, feared Robin.

"He wants to finish the book," she said.

"That will take nearly two months," replied Martin.

"Do you want to go?"

Martin kicked a loose stone out of his path. "I want to do whatever is best for you," he said, keeping his eyes on the ground.

"And for him," she prompted. She had taken new strength and assurance from him; she believed herself capable, now, to carry on the struggle.

"And for him, of course," agreed Martin.

"We *must* put him first," she said, coming back to comparative safety, and Martin admitted the necessity.

For the remainder of the walk, they were scrupulously careful to avoid dangerous ground; but when they came to the gate of Garroch Martin stopped and looked up at the familiar untidy face of it.

"Don't you hate that house?" he asked.

Margaret shuddered faintly.

"We are getting later every day. It must be after five," was all she said; but another confidence had been established.

4

They suffered a weak reaction next day, and they might have held out for some time longer if circumstances had not combined against them.

On Wednesday night, Martin had not gone upstairs at half-past ten as usual, but had betaken himself to the dining-room on the excuse of writing letters. He proposed to repeat this procedure on Thursday, and by way of preparing the ground, he opened the subject when he was alone in the study with Greg before dinner.

"I haven't been sleeping too well the last few nights," was his preliminary statement. It came with unfortu-

nate irrelevancy, but he was afraid that dinner might be announced at any moment and he knew that this would be his only opportunity. He felt that he could not display his plan in Margaret's presence.

Greg made a noise in his throat and looked up at him with an expression that said, "Well, go on! What are ye drivin' at?"

"So I think, if you don't mind, I'll go and work in the dining-room for a bit, instead of going to bed at ten o'clock. It's too early for me, really, you know," Martin continued.

"Since when have ye found that out?" asked Greg.

"The last week or two," Martin said.

Greg grunted again. He looked tired and depressed.

"What's wrong with ye?" he asked, and added, "But naturally ye'll say ye're not gettin' enough exercise. Ye're daft about exercise."

"Well, I don't get much, do I?" said Martin.

"Aren't ye havin' your walks, now?" asked Greg, quickly.

"Oh! yes. I walked about ten miles this afternoon," said Martin. "But this is the first winter I haven't played footer. Walking isn't the same thing."

Greg seemed satisfied under that head, but he had apparently some objection to urge against Martin's plan of working in the dining-room.

"It'll be gey cold in there," he said.

"I didn't feel it cold last night," returned Martin.

"Och! Ye're as full of fancies as an old maid," said Greg peevishly. "Ye go to yer bed at half-past ten. Ye'll sleep right enough. I heard ye snorin' two nights ago when I came up."

"I don't think you did," said Martin. "I was wide awake." He had not, indeed, begun to undress.

Greg laughed a hoot of unbelief.

"I was reading," said Martin quietly.

"Eh! well, take a book up and read to-night," said Greg. "I'll not mind if ye fall off to sleep and leave the

light on. Maybe, I'll give ye a look in when I come up meself."

"I want to write," said Martin stubbornly.

"The book's not in such a hurry," replied Greg.

"It's not the book, it's some stuff of my own—journalism."

Apparently Greg was too tired to dispute the point any further. "Ye're as stubborn as a mule," he remarked. "Have it yer own way, but I'll ask ye not to make a practice of it."

"Why not?" asked Martin.

"That'll be my affair, I'm thinkin'," replied Greg curtly. "Come away, now. The dinner's ready."

Martin had won his point for that night, and departed to the dining-room soon after ten o'clock; but he was uneasy and restless—he made little progress with the writing he had set himself to do. Why, he wondered, had Greg been so anxious to send him to bed? There must be some reason. Only one possible explanation presented itself, however, and that he instantly put away from him.

Greg did not look into the dining-room after he had locked up, and Martin sat on in the cold until nearly one o'clock.

He was realizing that it would be very difficult for him to persist in this plan of his, but he was more determined than ever that he would so persist.

That determination should have eased his mind, but when he was in bed he found that he had no desire for sleep. His doubt of Greg had come to keep him company through the night; it faced him until he choked with disgust of himself and Robin.

5

And on Friday afternoon came the mist that altered all the conditions of that last walk before the intolerable interval of another week-end.

In London it was a dense, stifling fog, but out there on the common it was a beautiful white cloud that shut them into a little world of their own. They moved through it and yet remained always isolated in their little enceinte of invisibility; their dim vision of earth confined to each other, to the path at their feet and to the spectral forms of hedges and trees that grew from pale shadows to momentary solidity and faded into mist again behind them.

Yet at the outset Martin was determined to be practical. He meant to lay the ghost that had ridden him in the night.

"We shan't get another walk until Monday," he began, as they went up the lane, "and I want to ask you something before—before to-morrow and Sunday."

"Well, go on," Margaret encouraged him.

"I want to know," he said, "whether you would sooner I sat up in the dining-room at night?" He stopped, and as she did not answer he went on. "I'd made a sort of plan to do it, but when I told him, he did all he could to put me off it, and I wondered whether you would sooner I didn't, too?"

"I don't see that it can make any difference," she said coldly.

"Why did he make such a fuss, then?" persisted Martin.

"Did you tell him about our walks?" she asked irrelevantly.

"No! Why?"

"He asked me last night what I'd been doing in the afternoon."

"What did you say?"

"I—I lied," she said. "Oh! I know I ought not to have lied," she continued eagerly, "but he's so suspicious, it makes me want to deceive him."

"I suppose he believed you?" Martin asked.

"Oh! yes, he believed me," she said.

"I told him that I had walked ten miles," was Martin's comment.

There had been no agreement between them as to hiding the fact of these walks together, and now they were faced by the knowledge that each of them had understood that this daily intercourse of theirs had been in some sense surreptitious, something that it was necessary to hide from Robin.

"Do you think we ought to stop going out together in the afternoon?" asked Martin, putting the thing into words.

"I suppose we ought," she agreed.

"I should miss it awfully," he said on a note of complete despair.

"If only he were safe," Margaret said evasively, trying to avoid the inevitable climax.

"Wouldn't you?" he persisted.

"That isn't the point," she said. "We must not lose sight of what is best for Robin. Think of the horror of it all if he lapsed again after all we've done."

"Oh! I know," Martin said gloomily. "But I don't see that it need come to that. After all, it means air and exercise for you, and you want some relief from—from the atmosphere of that house. You've been looking ever so much better since you've been out more. You don't mind my saying all this, do you?"

She shook her head, but made no other reply, so he went on,

"And if we were in the house it wouldn't be any better. Am I to tell him every time I speak to you?"

She laughed softly. "Perhaps it would be better if you didn't speak to me," she suggested.

"But *why*?" he asked. "Why shouldn't I go out with you; why should he mind my sitting up in the dining-room; why should he want to know about everything we do?"

He was so earnest in his perplexity that he amazed

her. He appeared at that moment so strangely unsophisticated.

"Perhaps he thinks you pay me too much attention," she said quietly.

"Oh! what rot!" mumbled Martin.

"Is it?" she asked.

"In that way it is," he said. "I mean that I'm only a sort of . . ." he hesitated for a word and she supplied him with one.

"A sort of watch-dog?"

"Yes, if you like."

"He hates being watched."

"I'm not watching *him*."

"Aren't you?"

"Well, I only want to—to do what's best for you. If you think I'd better go, I'll go." He gave it out with a touch of defiance, not daring her to send him away, but proclaiming his servitude.

"Oh! why can't we talk of something else?" she said passionately.

"Because we've got to make some sort of decision, I suppose," said Martin. "It seems that we can't go on as we are."

"By the way, where are we?" asked Margaret, stopping and trying to peer through the mist.

6

Ten yards ahead of them all sight of the world ceased. The dark, wet hedge on their right hand was like any other hedge; but the road before them sloped downwards, and by this they knew that they must have crossed the common. The only sound in that little world of theirs in which they were so wonderfully alone, was the soft occasional drip of water. And they, too, seemed to be becoming a part of the mist. On Margaret's toque, on her dark hair, and on her rough coat, as on

Martin's also, the mist had accumulated in tiny silver drops, that frosted them and gave them an air of belonging to the small perfect circle that ringed them in from all sight and sound of humanity.

"Does it matter?" asked Martin, answering her question. "We can always go back the way we came."

"Can we?" she asked, and looked up at him.

"If only we could be lost and never go back," he said.

"But we can't, you know we can't," returned Margaret.

Quite suddenly Martin realized that the thing had been said; that he had declared his love to her and had not been repulsed. It came to him with a tremendous shock of amazement that possibly she cared for him. So unmarked had been the degrees by which he had approached her confidence that he had never even regarded her as possible love or wife of his. Service had been his simple ideal, and he had so consistently kept the thought before him that none other had consciously overridden it. Now, the thought broke and fled, fading away into the mist.

He stood trembling and wondering, looking down at her.

"But if we could," he stammered, a little afraid.

"You know we can't," she replied bravely.

"Yes, I know we can't," he repeated. "I know, I know, but . . ." He broke off and began again. "It's all so wonderful to me. I didn't understand till this moment . . ."

"What do you understand now?" she asked, looking past him into the white obscurity.

Their isolation gave him courage. "Perhaps I don't understand at all," he ventured. "But if things had been different, if there had been no Robin Greg to save, if you had been quite free, is it possible that you could ever have . . . cared for me a little?"

"Oh! Martin, we mustn't be lost," she said . . .

And even after he had taken her hand and, once,

reverently kissed her—the single seal that was, they agreed, to be remembered always and never again repeated—they still believed that they would be able to find their way home again.

After they had turned and were following, as they thought, the path by which they had come, their future of self-sacrifice was all planned and made clear.

They walked apart through their solitude and made vows of desolation.

"We must go on as if this walk had never been," Margaret said. "We must count it as something that happened outside the world altogether."

"Only we shall know," Martin said. "The world that we are going back to can never be the same again."

"It must be," she said. "We daren't give him up now. If the only thing that will save him is my marrying him, it must be done. You must realize that. You must face it."

He shuddered. "I know. I'll try to face it," he said.

"And you must not watch me any more."

"Why not?" he asked.

"Because if you do he will guess. And he must never guess, never."

"It's frightfully hard."

"But it's the only thing we can do."

He tried to believe it, thrilling yet at the memory that his lips had touched hers for one infinite second of time. He was so astoundingly glorified and blessed, even if this were all.

7

The realization that they were certainly in an unknown road, seemed a part of that magic walk. They had come to a high brick wall, coped by a prodigious bolster of ivy that sagged and dropped wet streamers over the path.

"We *are* lost," said Margaret, looking up. "We've

never passed this wall before. I don't recognize it in the least."

"Nor I," agreed Martin. "Can't we go on being lost for a time?"

"Oh! no; we must get back." She was suddenly frightened and practical now. "We must get back before six."

"It can't be four yet," he said. "It isn't nearly dark."

"But where are we?" she urged. "It may take us hours to get back if we simply walk on. We may be going right away from home."

"If we follow the wall, we shall probably come to a gate," he suggested. "Then we can go in and ask our way. You're not afraid, are you?" he asked, seeing the look of anxiety in her face.

"I shouldn't be if it were not that we must be home before he gets back from the City," she said, and added, "I thought you were so practical."

"I was until this afternoon," he said.

"You are breaking your promises already," she scolded him.

"They don't begin to take effect until this walk is over," he said.

"They begin now, this instant," she returned.

For a moment he was a little chilled and they walked on under the wall in silence until they came to tall stone gateposts supporting massive iron gates.

"I'm afraid I know where we are now," he said reluctantly. "I only came this way once and I had forgotten it. We are up a side lane, but if we keep on it will take us out into the main road and we can go down to the trams and get back that way. It's only about two miles."

He was sorry that this walk of all others should end unromantically with a sight of trams and shops and finally that terrible road up from the station.

XX. RESOLUTION.

I

THE heights of exaltation to which Martin had been raised that afternoon were soon succeeded by corresponding depths of depression. The influence of Garroch stood between him and any contemplation of happiness. He returned from his supreme moment to the knowledge that he was faced with renunciation, that he must remain a subordinate figure in the drama that had involved him.

That single kiss, of which his lips were still conscious, was the seal of his vow of sacrifice, and he saw that he must keep his understanding of that vow constantly before him. In the comparative solitude of his own room he could find a certain consolation in the regard of his future; it wore an aspect recognizably heroic, ascetic; but when he entered into the common life of the household, the nobility of his sacrifice became obscured by all his physical and spiritual reactions.

He got a clear sight of the difficulties ahead of him the same night.

Greg came in full of an account of the fog in the City. He seemed at once to boast of his own experience and to cast aspersions on London as the only city in the world in which such horrors were possible.

"Och! London's a filthy place," he said, and looked at Martin as if he, as an Englishman, was included in the general condemnation.

If this had been his only source of annoyance through dinner, Martin could have controlled his impatience without difficulty, but Margaret's attitude was less bearable than Greg's implicit boast. She was too compliant, too eager to simulate interest, Martin thought;

she was displaying, again, the deference and submission he had criticized when he first saw her.

"I believe Glasgow's worse," he said at last, less to defend London than to set an example of opposition.

"Not it," returned Greg with finality. "Glasgie's a Paradise compared to that filthy hole."

"You're prejudiced," said Martin.

"Ye'd not say so if ye'd been in the City to-day," said Greg; "but then ye're not without some little bias yerself, I'm thinkin'."

"Oh! I've got no brief for London," said Martin, "but I think you overdo it."

"Eh! well, I'll take ye to Glasgie myself, some day," said Greg, "and then ye'll understand the difference. But it's Edinburgh ye ought to see."

"I've seen Cologne and Dresden," put in Martin.

"They're not so beautiful in some ways as Edinburgh," said Margaret.

Martin shrugged his shoulders. "Not to a Scotchman, anyway," he suggested with a flash of temper.

"Maybe," said Greg drily, "but he'll be a better judge than an Englishman in any case."

"That's a matter of opinion," retorted Martin.

"Not at all," said Greg, enjoying his sport. "It's plain that Englishmen have no taste or they could never have built such an awful place as London."

The chuckle with which he emphasized his point still further exasperated Martin, but before he could find an effective reply Greg continued,

"That's one of the two things the English lack, the other is a sense of humour. The Scotch have it, but the English have only a sense of the ridiculous. Do ye not agree with me, Maggie?"

Margaret smiled. "Yes, I think it's true," she said.

"However, Bond'll be an exception, no doubt," went on Greg. "But ye seem out of sorts to-night, laddie. Did ye not get yer exercise to-day?"

"Oh! yes, I went for a walk," said Martin, and looked

at Margaret. He wanted to embarrass her; he was angry with her for deferring to Robin.

"Where did you go?" she asked with perfect composure, and Martin felt rebuked. She was right and he was wrong. They had agreed to sacrifice themselves, and already he was breaking the spirit of their agreement.

"Oh! up over the Common," he mumbled. "I don't know exactly; it was very misty."

He took up his burden again and turned a smiling face to Greg.

"You're always pulling my leg about being an Englishman," he said. "Am I so typically, uncompromisingly English?"

"Ye have moments of it," replied Greg. "It's then I can always get a rise out of ye."

"You know the moments then?" asked Martin.

"Aye, ye stiffen yerself and look down yer nose, and I can almost smell the Cambridge manner," replied Greg with a hoot.

Martin laughed. "Oh! well, you're Scotch all the time," he said.

"And I'm proud of it," said Greg; "but ye seem none so proud of being English."

Martin allowed him to have the last word.

But it was not Greg's provocative witticisms that Martin remembered when he had gone up to his own room and left the other two alone together in the study. The doubt that beset him when he sat on the bed and struggled afresh with his problem, was a doubt of Margaret, that involved, also, a doubt of himself. He could not be sure how much she cared; he wondered how far her wonderful condescension of that afternoon had been due to her pity for him. And that doubt stayed with him and grew in intensity during the next two days.

All the dull, familiar routine of the house remained unaltered, only his own emotions were changed. By Sunday night he had worked himself to a pitch of nervous irritability.

He found expression and solace on Monday afternoon.

Margaret, consenting to sit on with him in the dining-room after Biddie had gone upstairs, nevertheless shook her head at the suggestion that they should take their usual walk.

"Better not," was the only reason she advanced.

Martin set his lips and then stated his case with a fine simplicity. "I simply can't stand it," he said.

Margaret looked distressed. She put her hands on the edge of the table and pushed back her chair. "But you promised," she remonstrated.

"I know, but after two days of seeing you with him, I must have something from you. If you won't come out will you sing or come into the study for an hour or two?"

"Wouldn't that be worse?" she asked.

"Am I never to see you, now, except at meals?"

"I think it would be better if you didn't," she said.

"I believe you would sooner I went away," Martin broke out. "If you would, I wish you would tell me at once and let me go." He hesitated and looked anxiously at her, awaiting her denial, and as she did not answer him, he added, "There's no reason on earth why I should stay. I'm no good here now."

Still she did not reply. She drew her chair in again, leaned her elbows on the table and hid her face in her hands.

"Hadn't I better clear out?" he persisted.

She shook her head weakly and he realized that she was on the verge of tears. He got up and stood by the fireplace. He did not know what to say or do. He longed for the courage to comfort her, but he felt shy and awkward.

"I knew it would come to this," Margaret said at last. She was evidently controlling herself with difficulty. "And you'll never understand, never, never."

"Try and tell me," he said gently. He went back to his chair again, and laid his hand on the table as near hers as he dared.

"You're so stupid, in some things," she flashed out at him, and dropped her hands into her lap.

He flushed a little and sighed. "I know," he said, humbly.

"Why can't you be content to go on?" she asked.

"Content with nothing?"

"Is Robin nothing to you?"

"He's safe, now."

She shook her head wearily. "He isn't safe," she said. "He'll never be safe."

"You believe that and still you're going to marry him?" Martin's amazement at her statement showed how little he had understood the real problem.

"Oh! I must try and explain everything to you," she said. "Come into the study. Hester's waiting to clear away and wash up."

3

"Now, sit quietly and smoke," she said when they were in the other room, safe from interruption. "Oh! and listen and try to understand some of the things I can't tell you."

"All right," said Martin resolutely. He lighted a cigarette and composed himself to give her his full attention.

"But don't stare at me all the time," she said. "and don't look as if you were attending a lecture."

"I wish I could get the right attitude," he said smiling.

She shook her head. "No, don't try to," she said. "I prefer you as you are, even when you are . . . wooden—but I can't be stared at just now."

He set off that description of himself against her statement that she preferred him as he was, however

wooden, consoling himself with the reflection that whatever she had found to like in him expressed, at least, the natural man.

Margaret had fallen into her usual pose, her head back in the corner of her chair, her hands laid out on its arms. The attitude represented her desire for physical repose and nervous recuperation.

"I'm ten years older than I was when I came back here," she began unexpectedly.

Martin shook his head and pursed his mouth, but did not interrupt her.

"I am," she said. "I look older and I feel older. For the last three weeks I've felt more like forty than twenty-seven. And you've noticed it and Robin has noticed it, and that's made me worse. I wonder my hair isn't white."

"I didn't notice that you looked older," said Martin. "I noticed that you had altered in some way."

"It means the same thing," she said wearily. "Don't bother to contradict me; I know what you think about it, but it does make me feel as if I were your mother."

She paused for a moment and her fingers fidgeted with the binding of the chair arms. "Well, I wonder if I can make the whole thing clear to you," she went on, "about Robin and me and you? Can't you understand to begin with that I don't . . . don't like Robin as . . . as a lover, that sometimes I hate him, loathe him." She sat quite still, but a breath of passion crept into her voice. "Only as a lover, you know," she said. "As a man, a brother, a friend, I admire him, immensely. It's just physical. You see, I can't explain, but perhaps you remember how he used to go at his whisky before the cure, how he looked at it, a horrible gloating—what's the word?—*avid*, look. Well, I've seen him look like that lately, only it wasn't whisky he wanted then."

Martin leaned suddenly forward in his chair and clenched his hands. "You shan't go on with this," he said fiercely. "It isn't possible. You shan't go on."

"Be sensible," said Margaret quietly. "That's one side. Now, please listen to the other. And, perhaps, you remember how I told you Robin's story in here, a few weeks ago? Well, I had to beseech you then just to believe what I told you, without question. Will you believe me now, in the same way?"

Martin was still restless, nervously stroking the back of his head and making little irritable movements.

"Yes, I will believe you," he said, trying to compose himself. "I will, really."

"Don't fidget, then," said Margaret. "It's no use losing your temper about it, yet. You've got to understand—everything. Well, in the first place, I know that Robin isn't safe yet—not really safe. He's run down and craving for stimulants. He's taking ammoniated quinine every morning as a tonic. He's bothered about his business and he's just trying to keep himself up to the mark the best way he can. And partly at all events he's doing it for me." She paused and then said without emotion, "I don't think he loves me; but I mean something to him. He wants me as a friend for one thing. He must have some one who will listen to him and praise him, and look up to him as the centre of a universe. That's Robin; he was always like that and Elsie adored him. But he's full of passion, too. I suppose that's been one cause of all his trouble; and I appeal to him. So you see I mean a great deal to him and I have tried, I am still trying, to be all, nearly all, that he wants me to be . . ."

"But you can't," put in Martin.

"I can," said Margaret. "It's just a question of how far one has a duty to him, how far one ought to carry one's sacrifice. Is there really any limit? If I gave him up now, he would go back to whisky. I know it as surely as I know anything in the world. Partly he would do it out of sheer desperation, and, a little perhaps, to revenge himself on me. And what would you and I feel then? Do you think we could ever face life again? I don't think I could. We should have killed him. He wouldn't

live long if he went back now. Remember how splendid it all was when he first took the cure, and then think how we should feel about it if we knew that we might have saved him and just didn't . . ."

"It's an awful position," murmured Martin. He clenched his teeth and his hands and stared fiercely at the fire. "Couldn't you go away for a time?" he suggested, after a short interval.

"I daren't now. It's too great a risk," she said. "It's so critical."

"If he gets this Dutch business through . . ."

"He wants to go abroad for a time . . . with me," said Margaret.

Martin swore under his breath.

"It comes to that in the end, whatever happens," she said.

The room was growing dark. All the influences of the house were closing in about them, urging them to sacrifice everything they desired for the sake of that one dominant spirit.

"Wouldn't it be better if I went?" asked Martin, after a long pause.

Margaret had been strong and resolute till now. She had stated the case with fine honesty, shirking not a single argument that impelled them both to renunciation. But at his suggestion her strength suddenly failed her. She leaned forward and held out her hands to him.

"Oh! Martin, don't go away," she said. "I'm so afraid to be left alone with him."

He dropped on his knees by her chair and put his arm round her. "What else can I do?" he asked.

She leaned her head towards him until her hair was against his cheek; and he held her a little closer, thrilling in every nerve with joy at the touch of her.

"What else can I do?" he repeated, and gently kissed her hair.

"Not yet," she whispered. "You give me strength. If you went now, I couldn't stay."

She turned her head and put her cheek against his. "You are so strong, and kind," she said; and then added with a faint shudder, "and so clean."

He gave a little laugh and held her more boldly. "That's something," he said.

"It was the first thing I noticed about you," she said. "This house is never clean; it's dirty right through in some way."

For a minute or two they were silent, and then, as if she had drawn sufficient strength from him, she made a movement to release herself. "You needn't go for another week or two," she said.

He held her for a moment and very reverently and tenderly kissed her lips before he released her.

She sighed and stood up.

"This must not ever happen again," she said.

"No," agreed Martin.

"We said the same thing on Friday," said Margaret, and added, "But this time it is final, isn't it?"

To save them from further temptation she rang the bell for tea.

4

They kept their resolve for four days. The afternoon walks were resumed, and they hardly spoke of Robin, and made no direct allusion to their own particular problem. At moments they were both happy, so content in each other's company that they lapsed into long, serene periods of silence. But by some unspoken agreement they had come to permit themselves one look of understanding, an unspoken acknowledgment of all that life meant to them in their relations with each other, when they reached the gate of Garroch on their return.

That look came to be the one incident of their walk; it marked at once the renewal of a vow, and a fount from which they might draw fresh courage before they

entered again the divided, torturing house they had come to dread. They looked forward to that culmination of their understanding and feared it. It marked the height to which they rose before they plunged into the despair of desperate purpose that enveloped them when they had passed the door of Garroch.

Their resolve was broken on Friday night.

Robin had announced his intention of staying at home the next day. There was little doing in the City, he said, and he would give the whole day to the book, which was still making excellent progress.

Martin looked up quickly at Margaret—they were at dinner—but she had more self control and smiled at Robin, applauding his determination.

Martin saw his mistake and added some muttered word of agreement. He was bitterly disappointed. They had planned to go out for an hour the next morning, to renew their strength before the trial of the week-end, and he resented that this little compensation should be snatched from him.

And later in the evening, when Robin had somewhat exceptionally left Margaret and Martin alone together in the study for a minute, he expressed his resentment without hesitation.

“What a beastly nuisance,” he said in an undertone.

“Hush!” Margaret said, with a warning glance at the door, and then whispered, “Never mind. It will only be for two days.” She leaned forward, their chairs were not far apart, and gave him her hand.

Martin held it tightly for a moment and then got up quickly, bent down over her and kissed her.

He had hardly sat down again before Robin came back.

Martin was reproved at breakfast next morning, but chiefly, it seemed, for his daring.

“You must never run such a risk again,” she insisted, and in her insistence on that point, the breaking of their vow was almost overlooked.

And when the vow was renewed again on Monday, it was only after a still more serious lapse.

The week-end had been an unusually trying one for Margaret. In the study after lunch she confessed that Robin had been "queer." "Once, last night, I had an awful feeling that—that he suspected," she told Martin.

He protested that that was impossible. "Tell me in what way he was queer," he said.

Margaret blushed. "He—he was rather impossible," she said; "but in another way. He wasn't so gentle as he has been, ever since the cure. He laughed at me in that jeering way he has. I had a terrible feeling for the moment that he had been drinking again. But he hadn't. It was not that. I'm afraid. Oh! I'm afraid his patience is wearing out. What *can* I do?" She leaned towards Martin and for quite five minutes their vow was completely forgotten.

"I must not tell you these things," she protested, when they had come back to a realization of their failing from the high standard they had set up before them. "I feel mean and disloyal. Martin, it *must* not happen again."

He was less certain. "Isn't there any way out?" he asked.

"You know there isn't," she said. "You must help me to be strong."

"Suppose that you married him and he broke out again?" he suggested.

"I would not let him," was her statement of faith, but she qualified it by adding, "If he did, I should leave him. I couldn't stand that."

But Margaret's helpless cry, the confession of failure implicit in her wavering "What *can* I do?" had marked the moment of greatest strain—in that direction—to

which she was to be subjected. The week that followed was made easier for her by a recognizable change in Robin's attitude.

At first the relief was so grateful that she accepted the change almost without question. She was saved from instant decision, and nothing else seemed to be of equal consequence at that time. Moreover she could not believe that her ease would last, and so accepted the comfort of it without too close an inquiry.

For several days she said nothing of the change to Martin. When he questioned her, either directly or by the expression of anxious doubt she had come to know so well, she quieted him by saying, "He was quite all right last night," or by such further assurance as, "We only talked about his business affairs and the book, after you had gone to bed." And when he had received her engagement that she would certainly tell him if she were faced by a crisis, they slipped into the ease of a code, a lift of Martin's eyebrows and a shake of Margaret's head, sometimes with an added murmur of "Quite all right" when they met every morning in the breakfast room.

But when Robin's change of attitude had endured for nearly a fortnight, Margaret began to suffer a new uneasiness, and one Friday afternoon in February she again sought help from Martin.

It was a day of high wind and driving rain, and after some little hesitation they had decided to stay in the house after lunch. This was the first time that the weather had kept them within doors, and both of them understood that wind and rain were offered as an excuse. Indeed, as soon as they were settled in the study, Martin admitted the understanding by saying, "Has anything happened?"

"No, not exactly," she prevaricated; doubtful, now, whether the confidence she had intended were not better suppressed.

"He hasn't . . . ?"

"No, not that," she reassured him. "But . . ."

"Can't you tell me?" he persisted.

She gave way by avoiding for a time what she supposed to be the essential point of her confession.

"I'm anxious about his health," she said.

"I thought he had been rather better lately, except for his headaches," returned Martin.

"Yes, but I only found out last night what was giving him those headaches," she explained. "Do you know that he has been taking nearly half a pint of ammoniated quinine every day?"

"Good Lord," was Martin's startled comment. "Is that because . . ."

"Oh! it's some mad idea of keeping himself up to the mark during office hours. He has been simply poisoning himself."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I told him that he must give that up—at once. He saw it, himself. He said he would get some hypophosphates in the City to-day and try that, instead. But that won't be any better . . ." She shrugged her shoulders and made a little gesture with her hands.

"He ought to go away," said Martin.

"Of course he *ought*, but you know he won't—not till this Dutch business is settled; and then . . ."

"Has he said anything more about that?"

She shook her head. She saw that she was committed now to the whole confidence.

"That isn't all," she went on, "although I think it's the worst. He's altered—ever since that Saturday he didn't go to the office."

"In what way?" Martin asked.

"He . . . I've never minded being alone with him since then."

"But you're glad of that, aren't you?"

"I was. I'm uneasy now. I'm afraid. I don't understand what is happening to him. I feel sometimes as if he had—in a way—given me up."

"He hasn't said anything?"

"No, I wish he would. He still talks as if we were engaged, but . . . I don't know, . . . he has altered. He watches me in an odd way when he thinks I don't see him—a sort of grim look; a little spiteful."

"If he gives you up . . ." began Martin.

"If *we* give *him* up," she interrupted, "however we do it, we shall never be able to forget it. Martin, we must do out best. We mustn't let things simply slide. I've been worrying dreadfully about it. What are we to do?"

Martin could not grasp the final issue. "As long as he keeps straight," he said, "we haven't any other responsibility. If he wants to give you up, and he can go on as he is, what could we have to blame ourselves for?"

"He won't go on as he is," said Margaret passionately. "You can't see that and you won't believe me. He must have *something*. He doesn't trust himself. If he did he wouldn't poison himself with quinine. Can't you see that the point is really, *why* he has given me up—if he has. Was it because I . . . ? I have been too selfish. I was so glad when he changed first. I've only realized the last few days that perhaps *I* ought to take the initiative, or at least, I ought not to be so cold to him. He must see how glad I am that he's different, that he has stopped making love to me."

She paused, and then as Martin frowned in silent perplexity over this new difficulty, she went on. "The responsibility doesn't only depend upon our sitting still and doing nothing wrong, we have got to *do* things, to—to do everything we can think of to help him."

"Not *that*," said Martin, with determination.

"Why not?" she asked, trying to hold to her half-formed resolution.

"You owe something to yourself. You have no right to ruin your own life, certainly, in order to save him, perhaps. *I* don't count one way or the other," he added.

"But you do," she said.

"No, put me out of it," Martin said firmly, and at the moment he intended quite honestly to put himself out of it.

"How can I?" she asked. "That's the only possible excuse I can have. If I spoil your life as well as my own."

He could not deny that she had it in her power to spoil his life.

"I don't count," he repeated feebly; and thought of all that life would mean to him if he had Margaret to help him—all that he could achieve.

"Would it spoil your life?" she persisted.

"Absolutely," said Martin.

"Well, then," she submitted.

"But my life doesn't matter," he said for the third time, and added, "Yours does."

"To you?"

"Not only to me," he said, struggling to extricate himself. "What I mean is that I don't think you are called upon to go as far as that. No woman could be."

She sighed. She understood it all so much more clearly than he ever could, and she was longing for the encouragement that she knew he would not give her. She wanted him to share the responsibility, not to take refuge in any ethical consideration.

The only decision at which they arrived was that they would both be very careful of Robin during the next two days.

6

He returned home unusually early that afternoon; they were still sitting over the tea-table when he came in. He looked cold and depressed, and stood by the fire warming his feet and complaining about the train service.

"Would you like some tea, Robin?" Margaret asked.

"Is it hot?" he asked.

"Oh! I'll make some fresh," she said eagerly.

"Don't ye bother," he replied curtly.

"It isn't any bother," said Margaret, and she took up the teapot and went out.

"There is only about one train in an hour at this time of the day," grumbled Robin, when she had gone, "and it stops at every station."

"Yes, I know; it's rotten," agreed Martin. He was never quite at ease, now, when he was alone with Greg, and this afternoon he felt more than usually distressed.

"Have ye done any work to-day?" asked Robin, after a pause.

Martin laughed. "Yes, rather," he said. "I was working all the morning."

"And why did ye not go out this afternoon?"

"It was so beastly wet and windy," Martin explained.

"I thought ye said ye liked it," replied Robin with a sneer.

Martin looked up quickly. The tone of that sneer was not the one that Martin knew well in connexion with those bouts of raillery to which he was so often subjected.

"I felt slack this afternoon," he said.

"Eh! well, ye can make up for it to-morrow and Sunday," replied Robin, and then, as if he realized that he had said too much, he added, "It'll maybe be finer then."

Martin left the room when Margaret returned with the tea. He went upstairs and sat for a time on the side of his bed pondering the things that had just been said downstairs. Had Greg any suspicion, he wondered, that there was some understanding between himself and Margaret?

Presently he got up and stood by the window. It was hardly dark yet, the days were drawing out, the spring would soon be coming. He could see the front gate swinging backwards and forwards in the wind, and hear now and again the clamour of its assault upon the post.

"I wish I could get out of it," he said to himself. He had a feeling that worse was to come, that if he could only go now, the position might still be saved. But he knew that he could never go and leave Margaret there alone. Nevertheless it seemed that the gate signalled only to him.

XXI DEFEAT.

I

THE question of what Margaret and Martin "ought to do" was settled for them by Robin himself. Margaret reported on Monday afternoon, that despite Martin's firm definition of her responsibilities, she had made tentative advances to Robin on Sunday night and that she had been repulsed.

"He's playing with us," she said, "I'm sure of it."

Martin would not believe that. There were warmth and light in the air that afternoon, and once out of the house his spirit had risen to meet the spring.

"We have been too shut up with the whole affair," he explained, admitting that he, too, had been susceptible to the suggestion of Garroch. It's got on our nerves. We are looking for trouble the whole time."

"I wish I could think so," Margaret said.

"Isn't there a simpler explanation?" was Martin's next approach to a rational account of the trouble.

"Such as . . ." she suggested.

"Well, you admitted on Friday that he has never really cared for you, not as he cared for your sister—utterly incomprehensible as such a thing seems to me."

"Well?" she prompted him.

"And, perhaps, now he feels that he is able to stand on his own feet again, he doesn't want you in the same way any more."

"Is he on his feet?"

"I believe he is." Martin was suddenly confident; filled with the glorious certainty of returning sap. "I do really believe he is, and don't you see—" a most appealing theory had just presented itself to him—"that he must feel, now, that he has hardly played straight

with you. Perhaps, he wants to back out of the engagement, and is not sure how much you care for him. That would explain all his oddness during the last fortnight, wouldn't it? Are you sure that he is not trying to give you a hint that he wants you to release him?"

"I wonder," said Margaret thoughtfully. This theory of Martin's was singularly appealing. "Oh! it seems too good to be true," she added, with emotion.

Martin took her hand in his and for some time they walked on in happy silence.

"It is true," said Martin at last.

"It may be," she returned.

"If it *were* true," he began, "would you . . ."

"We must not think of that yet," she said, and gently pressed his hand.

"Think of the green coming back," he said, after a long interval.

She drew a deep breath of sheer delight. "Is it possible that it will?" she said softly.

"Certain," he said, with a laugh, "and we shall see it—together."

"After all those terrible months," she concluded.

2

They discussed Martin's theory several times that week; it was a theory with such comforting possibilities; and the more they examined it, the more plausible it appeared. Margaret was only waiting a favourable opportunity in order to put it to the test. They had decided that she must approach the subject to Robin, test him, give him a chance to cry off, if he wished it.

"Perhaps to-morrow or Sunday," she suggested, as they sat over tea in the study on Friday afternoon. They were both a little excited. They had caught a glimpse of possible release.

"Yes," Martin agreed. "He may be early to-night," he added, looking at his watch. "He was last Friday."

"Do you think I had better go?" she asked.

"Oh! no. Why should you?" he replied. "We've been out." He looked down at the evidence of his boots. "There's no reason why you shouldn't have tea in here with me."

"No, I know there isn't," she said. "But there's one thing I want to say. If—if it is as we hope, he mustn't know yet, mustn't be allowed to guess, that you and I . . ."

"Not yet, I suppose," he admitted unwillingly.

"Oh! No," she said emphatically. "Not for a long time, not until you've gone away from here."

He was not willing to concede so much. "I don't see why . . ." he began.

"It would be impossible," she protested. "I would not have him guess that for anything. Promise you won't let him guess, Martin."

"Of course, if you feel like that about it," he hesitated.

"I *do*," she declared.

"You think he would mind?"

"I know he would, and it would seem as if I had been playing false to him, all the time. And I have, that's the worst of it."

"I don't see that you need look at it like that," Martin said. "It was just that we couldn't help ourselves."

"No, we couldn't help ourselves," she repeated. "I know we couldn't, but he wouldn't understand."

"I suppose not," agreed Martin.

"I shall always feel that I might have done more," she said presently.

"You couldn't," he protested. "You couldn't possibly. Besides, nothing more was required. He is all right again now."

Margaret was doubtful.

"You're down again, to-night," he said. "That's the influence of this beastly house, and knowing that you'll be shut up in it for the next two days."

She looked up at him. "You are quite satisfied now?" she asked.

"About him? Oh! yes!"

"And you really think that he wants to get out of our engagement?"

"I do, honestly."

She was almost reassured—drawing strength from his certainty—when they heard the slam of the front door.

"There he is," said Martin, and they both looked round to welcome him. But Robin did not, as usual, come at once into the study in order to take out the papers and manuscripts from his pockets, before removing his overcoat.

"He has gone straight upstairs!" Margaret said. And there was fear in her eyes and in the sound of her voice.

"Yes," said Martin, thrilled in spite of himself. "But—but why are you . . .?"

"Hush!" she warned him. She stood up, and held herself rigid, listening intently.

They could hear the sound of Robin's footsteps in the room overhead.

"What is it? What's the matter?" asked Martin in a low voice.

She did not answer him, and almost immediately they heard Robin coming down again. He stopped in the hall to take off his overcoat and then came into the study.

"Hello!" he said, cheerfully. "Have ye not finished your teas yet. It'll be nearly six o'clock. Eh! well, I think I've settled that Dutch business. I'll maybe have to go to town to-morrow, but we'll have a good day at the book on Sunday."

He had changed his boots for carpet slippers, and when he sat back in his arm-chair he stretched out his feet with a gesture of relief.

"Och! that's a comfort," he said. "I've been wearin'

new boots to-day, and when I got in I just could not wait a moment till I had them off."

He was in a better humour than he had shown for weeks past and talked freely about the Dutch business. It seemed to account for his welcome change of mood.

Martin was immensely relieved, he was confirmed in his opinion that all was now going right for the three of them; but Margaret did not respond to Robin's genial advances. She leaned back in her chair, taking no part in the conversation, and presently she gathered up the tea-tray and left the room.

"What's wrong with Maggie to-night?" asked Greg, when she had gone.

"I don't know," said Martin carelessly. "I thought she seemed a bit depressed at tea-time."

"She's a creature of moods," replied Greg rather bitterly; and then he changed the conversation quickly by saying, "Eh! I forgot to tell you that I got on to Wotterhoose to-day. He told me our article was comin' out in the March number and he wants me to speak for him at a big meetin' on Wednesday night."

3

Margaret came into the study before lunch the next morning. She had refused to discuss the subject of Robin at breakfast. "Wait until he has gone," she had said.

Martin could see that she was anxious and perplexed. "I think you are bothering yourself about nothing," he said.

"I hope so; I hope so," replied Margaret, "but I'm horribly afraid."

"I didn't see any sign of it," Martin said. "I watched him pretty closely last night. He didn't go out of the room after dinner, or anything."

She smiled faintly at this summary of his close observation.

"Why did he go straight upstairs?" she asked.

"He explained that."

"Of course. He will explain anything."

"Had he got new boots?"

She nodded. "He would never make up excuses that I could disprove the next minute," she said. "Do remember how clever he is."

"Still that was quite a likely reason for his going up," argued Martin. "What else was there?"

"Nothing definite. But I'm afraid. I don't quite know why; I haven't half a dozen reasons to give you, but I'm horribly afraid."

Martin looked judicial. "It's the house," he said. "Anyhow, we shall probably know before Monday..."

But when Monday came, they had no more certain facts for argument than they had had on Saturday.

Robin had been in good spirits on Sunday, had worked well on the book, and exhibited no sign of an urgent desire to be alone at any time. Martin was satisfied in his own mind that Margaret had been mistaken, but she was nervous and dispirited.

"I'm almost sure," she said after lunch, "that he is beginning again."

Martin frowned. "Let's get out," he suggested. "You'll see things more clearly in the open air."

"Of course, you won't believe me," she said miserably. "No, I'm not going out this afternoon. I couldn't. You go alone. I want to think what I can do."

Martin looked unhappy. "Can't I help?" he asked.

"You don't believe me," she said impatiently.

"There's no evidence," he protested.

"Oh? didn't you see the way he cuddled Biddie yesterday afternoon?" she said. "And kept asking her who she loved best? You seem to expect that he will give himself away by some silly carelessness. He won't. You don't know him. He'll be more cunning than ever, and Heaven knows he was cunning enough before."

"Are you quite convinced, then?" Martin asked.

"No!" said Margaret, "I'm not. I'm just horribly suspicious."

"Do you really think his manner towards Biddie meant anything?"

"It might. He used to be like that with her, and he hasn't lately. It is just those tiny things that give him away. You see, if he has begun again, he's probably drinking very little, comparatively. He's deceiving himself, perhaps, with the idea that he can limit himself, just as he did before. I don't know. Oh! Martin, what can I do?"

"You can't do anything, yet," he said. He knelt down by her and took her hands in his and began to comfort her.

She did not repulse him, and presently they went out together for their usual walk.

Robin was late that night, but his reasons were unsailable. He gave them the fullest details of the business meeting that had detained him; and that excuse—if it were an excuse—also explained his desire to get to bed rather earlier than usual.

He told them that the Dutch business was to be definitely closed on Friday, but he had said nothing more to Margaret about going abroad.

4

Nor was there any one indication, any moment, to which they could afterwards point and say that at that instant their suspicions became a certainty. The fear grew from day to day, by little, unremarkable degrees. All the old horror was creeping back, but so slowly that they could only appreciate the change in retrospect. The first time that Robin failed to catch the earlier train was almost unnoticed; an excellent reason for his lateness was forthcoming—he had been speaking at Waterhouse's meeting the previous night and had overtired himself. Margaret had sat up for him, but had found

nothing in his manner definitely to confirm her doubt. Nevertheless, he was without question gradually dropping back into his old ways. The old rush in the morning had developed to the slamming of the front door, his eyes had come little by little to take on again a look of furtive defence, and almost imperceptibly the faint reek of stale alcohol was stealthily pervading the house. And yet they had no positive evidence against him. They were unable to produce one undeniable fact in proof of their suspicion.

The first week in March found them still hesitant; desperately certain, now, that all their work had gone for nought, but quite undecided how to act.

"We must bring it home to him and try all over again," Martin said, with doubtful conviction.

"We must, we *must*," Margaret agreed with over insistence.

They searched his room one afternoon when Hester was out, but found no single piece of incriminating evidence.

"I suppose it *is*—absolutely certain?" said Martin, hopefully influenced for a moment by their failure.

Margaret smiled bitterly. "Do you notice anything odd about the smell of this room?" she asked.

Martin sighed and stroked the back of his head.

"We must catch him red-handed," he said. "He's bound to give himself away sooner or later, and then we must get him away."

"He won't go," replied Margaret wearily. "He has still the same old excuse of business."

"But if this Dutch business . . ." Martin began, but she interrupted him by saying,

"He has made a mess of it in the last three weeks, if there ever was any hope of getting it through."

"But he said . . ."

"Oh! dear," exclaimed Margaret, on a note of exasperation. "Don't you know yet that when he's like this you can't believe a single thing he tells you?"

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Martin. He was always being disconcertingly confronted at this time by the spectacle of his own futility. To avoid it on the present occasion he suggested that they should "tackle him on suspicion" as he said, without waiting for proof positive.

"We will if you like," agreed Margaret without enthusiasm.

5

That doubtful attack was made unnecessary by Robin himself, for that same evening he made a declaration of his independence.

He was home earlier than usual, and when Margaret came into the study before dinner, he got out of his chair and faced the other two across the hearthrug.

"I've something to say to ye," he said. He was unquestionably sober, and had perfect control of himself. Unconsciously Martin and Margaret drew a little closer together; a sudden fear beset both of them; they believed that what he had to say primarily concerned themselves.

"It's about that 'cure' ye gave me," Robin went on; and no doubt he noted their unconscious relaxation, their faint show of relief at escape from a threatened danger.

He smiled grimly and continued.

"Ye'll remember it, no doubt?"

"Robin, you're not going to . . ." began Margaret.

"Will ye hear me out," he said quietly. "Whatever ye have to say, ye can say when I've done. And I'll not be long. It's just this: I'll not be spied upon and watched in my own hoose. Ye've been up in my room this afternoon, turnin' the place upside down to find evidence against me, and I'll not have it. What I do is no concern of yours. But I'll admit," he went on in a kinder tone, "that I'm owin' ye some acknowledgment for having done yer best for me in the first instance. Ye have

helped to give me back my self-control which I was in some danger of losin,' maybe, a while ago. I'm not ungrateful to either of ye for that. But now that I'm master o' myself again, I'll not submit to be dictated to. And if I choose to have a glass of whisky with my dinner, I'll have it openly before ye both."

"Oh! Robin," wailed Margaret. "You know . . ."

"I'll know nothin' of the kind," he broke in. "The two cases are not parallel. I've learned my lesson and ye need have no fear whatever that I'll ever exceed my allowance again—none whatever. D'ye think I'm such a weak fool, that I cannot stop when I want? I tell ye that that cure has just made all the difference to me, and glad enough I am in some ways, that I took it. I've no—no cravin' for the drink now," he mumbled the phrase as if he were ashamed of it, "none whatever. I just need a stimulant now and again until this damned business of mine is settled. After that—and I've no doubt it'll be finished up within a week or two—I'll maybe take a long holiday, and then I'll not need a stimulant of any kind . . ."

He paused and faced his two antagonists defiantly. Margaret had dropped her head on to the writing table and covered her face with her hands, but Martin seemed half convinced, and it was to him that the next speech was addressed.

"We'll have the book finished next week, Bond?" he asked.

"Oh! yes," said Martin. "There's practically nothing to be done now, except general revision. But, I say, hadn't you better try and keep off whisky altogether; don't you think that . . .?"

"I'll be the best judge of what I should do and what I should not," returned Greg caustically. "Ye'll forgive me, Bond, if I'm not altogether guided by ye on moral grounds. Ye see, although I did not go to an English University, I have a certain standard of conduct of my own, nevertheless."

Martin flushed and hesitated, and his chance was lost for that occasion.

"So ye'll understand, both of ye," Greg continued, "that I'll take a glass of whisky with my dinner and maybe another before I go to bed, here in yer presence. And ye'll be so good as to take my word for it that I've hidden nothing in my room upstairs, and cease yer spyin' upon me. If ye try that again ye'll leave the house, both of ye, and outside of it ye can do what ye damned well please. Now, then, I believe dinner will be ready."

6

If the conversation had depended upon Martin, not another word would have been spoken that evening. He had taken umbrage at those last sentences of Greg's address; they reflected upon Margaret, and that Martin was determined he would not tolerate. Whatever could be said about his own conduct—and he was quite willing to criticize it, himself, in some respects—Margaret had been above reproach. No woman could have done more for a man, he thought, than she had done for Robin—except love him, and to do that was not in her power.

And it was Margaret who rose to the present occasion.

After her few minutes of prostration in the study, she recovered with apparent completeness, her self-control. Through dinner, she talked cheerfully of such safe topics as the imminent completion and publication of the book, and even succeeded in drawing Martin into a discussion on the still unsettled problem of its title.

But when dinner was over she tried to take the whole situation into her own hands.

"Have you any letters to write to-night, Mr Bond?" she asked.

He hesitated, unwilling to leave her unsupported. "I don't know that I have," he said.

"Well, couldn't you find some?" she returned, and he recognized that he had no choice in the matter.

"Oh! I'm sorry," he said. "If you want me to . . ."

Greg interrupted him. "No, we don't. Ye needn't go, Bond," he said, and then he turned to Margaret and continued, "It's no use at all your goin' on this way, Maggie. I know well enough all that ye have to say beforehand, and I can do no more than repeat what I said to ye a while since. Let's have no more of it, woman, for Heaven's sake. If ye want to stay in the hoose ye can. But I'll not be nagged by ye nor by anyone, so if ye wish to stay ye'll keep quiet."

Martin stood up. "You've no right to speak to Miss Hamilton like that," he said.

"Eh! and I'll not stand it from ye, either," returned Greg, without heat. "If I have another word ye can go off together. Maybe ye would not find the prospect unendurable," he added grimly.

"Oh! please, Mr Bond, be quiet," put in Margaret.

"If you want me to go, I'll go," said Martin firmly.

"Oh! ye can do whatever ye damned well please," returned Greg.

"Please, Mr Bond," repeated Margaret, and Martin, meeting her glance, realized that he was no longer a free agent.

"Have ye settled it between ye?" inquired Greg.

"Robin, won't you listen to me?" Margaret asked.

"I'd do anything in the world to save you from this—anything."

Martin caught his breath, and in the same instant came to a decision. If that wonderful offer were accepted he would interpose, he would declare his love for Margaret, he would carry her out of the house by force, if necessary. Greg might be lost to all eternity, but before God he should not be saved by the sacrifice of Margaret. And so satisfying was this sudden crystallization of his desires, so urgent his need for some definite and final action, that it came to him as a mortifying disappointment when Greg answered that offer of utter sacrifice by saying,

"Och! dinna blether, Maggie. Ye're overwrought, and will be havin' another of yer attacks if ye're no' carefu'. Go to your bed, girl. There's nothin' at all ye can do that'll make one atom of difference to me one way or the other, except hold your tongue on occasion."

She made no further effort. She was—as he had said—overwrought; overwrought by the strain that she had endured as she had planned her offer of sacrifice while she had talked so easily over the dinner table.

She got up slowly and, without speaking again, left the room.

Martin held the door open for her, but she gave him neither glance nor sign of any sort as she passed him. Nor did she take the smallest notice of him when he made a tentative movement to follow her. She stumbled on her way upstairs and clung tightly to the bannisters, raising herself with obvious effort from step to step.

Martin stood and watched her anxiously, and after he could see her no longer, he still waited until he heard her door close before he returned to the study.

Greg looked round as he came in. "Will ye join me in a glass of toddy, Bond?" he asked mockingly.

"No, thanks! I'm going to bed," said Martin.

As he closed the door he heard Greg's hooting laugh, pregnant again with all its old jeering, insulting significance.

"Damn you," muttered Martin to himself.

The bitterness of defeat had submerged him. The pregnant question put to him by Cecil Barker; the memory of the man he had almost loved; the pride and joy he had felt in those first days of success—all had become foolish and meaningless.

XXII. THE LAST TWO WEEKS.

I

MARGARET did not come down to breakfast next morning nor did she leave her room to assist in the final effort to get Robin out of the house in time to catch the 10.23.

He was late that morning. Martin, sitting in the study, heard the old horrible sounds repeated; and when at half-past nine, he wandered disconsolately upstairs with some vaguely defined purpose of assisting in the reveillé, he saw an untouched breakfast tray on the landing.

He shrugged his shoulders and knocked at Greg's door. "Are you going to the City to-day?" he asked loudly.

He was answered by an incomprehensible mumble from within, and tried the handle, only to find that the door was locked.

"Do you want to catch the 10.23?" he shouted.

"Aye. Tell Hester." The sound of the words were just distinguishable.

Nevertheless he was in the hall by eight minutes past ten.

"I'll maybe be late to-night," was all he said before he went. He was surly, and anxious to hide his face from the light. He slammed the front door behind him, and the key fell out on to the tiled floor of the lobby.

Martin stood staring at it thoughtfully for a moment and then went back to the study.

The sight of his work disgusted him; the atmosphere of the whole house, the thought of Robin Greg, the vision he had of himself and his own futility all disgusted him. He could not face the thought of a solitary morning; he longed passionately for Margaret. In her presence only could he find relief from the intolerable disgust that

stifled him. He leaned upon her in thought, he wanted her help and counsel.

And as if in answer to the compelling force of his desire, she presently came to him in the study.

She looked less tired this morning, but there were dark shadows under her eyes, and although she never lost her rather high colour, it seemed now to fade less gradually into the whiter skin around it.

"He's gone?" she asked as she came in.

"Oh! yes, half an hour ago," replied Martin. He looked at her with something of deprecation in his face, as if he had in some sense been responsible for the humiliation she had suffered the night before.

She sat down with a long sigh that might have indicated despair or relief.

Martin followed her to the fireplace, and stood on the rug looking anxiously down at her. "I suppose it's all up," he muttered, as she made no attempt to speak.

She paused for some seconds before she answered him. "As far as you are concerned," she said, and left him doubtful whether she had made an assertion or asked a question.

"As far as both of us are concerned," he said.

"I shan't give him up yet," she said.

"What more can you do?" Martin asked impatiently. He had realized when she spoke that he had been hoping she would express some other determination. What he had hoped, he dared not examine; but he was clearly conscious of his sense of disappointment.

"I don't know," replied Margaret hopelessly. "Go on, I suppose."

"For how long?"

"Until he kills himself, perhaps."

"But *why*?" he asked bitterly.

"Because I can't face the alternative," she said.

"There's no reason why *you* should stay. In fact, I don't see very well how you *can* stay after the book's finished."

"I shall stay as long as you do," he said.

"He may turn you out," she suggested.

"Then I shall take you with me," said Martin.

She smiled weakly. "Without my consent?" she asked.

"If necessary."

"It would come to that," she said.

"I'm glad," Martin said. "You've had too much responsibility all through. If he turns me out, as I dare say he will, I shall make you come too." He paused and then added "You know, I'm not the least afraid of him, now."

"Oh! no, I know," she said. "But he won't try to keep me. Of the two of us he'd sooner I went than you. He hates me again, now, just as he used to. It's partly my own fault."

Martin denied that vigorously, and she was glad that he should; glad, also, that he had threatened to take her away by force, if necessary. Nevertheless she meant to make one more attempt to save Robin.

"Will you give him the cure again?" she asked.

"If he'll consent to take it," replied Martin, but his soul sickened at the thought of it.

"Shall we try once more?"

"Of course we will."

"With all the same enthusiasm that we had before?"

"If we can work ourselves up to it."

"You hate him again, now," she said suddenly.

"No, I don't," said Martin.

She disregarded so insincere a denial. "You can't understand him," she said. "Already you've forgotten what he was when he was—well. And it's our fault that he is not well now. My fault, yes, and yours too. We ought never to have spoken to each other . . ." She broke off abruptly. "I don't know what we ought to have done," she concluded feebly.

"We couldn't have done anything but what we did do," said Martin. "You've let this thing get on your

nerves. You can't see it clearly, really you can't. Do look at it sensibly, dear."

"Well, go on," she said, smiling at him.

"In the first place, you couldn't have given him the cure at all if I hadn't been here," he said; and when she feebly admitted that, he continued, "And that, at least, was all to the good. Afterwards, he asked the impossible of you; and it's no use to pretend that you would have acted any differently if I had not been here. Would you?"

She shook her head. "Not then," she admitted. "Go on."

"He asked too much," Martin asserted. "He wants too much from you and from everybody. I see all his splendid qualities, but he's too greedy. He wants everybody to give in to him; he has to be the centre of everything."

"Yes, that's Robin," said Margaret. "And he gets it, too."

"Generally," was Martin's qualification. "This time he has failed, and I can't see that the responsibility of failure rests upon you or me. We have done our best."

"How long do you think he has known about you and me?" she asked.

"I don't know how much he knows, now; but in any case he can't have known long."

"He has. He knew before we did," said Margaret slowly. "That was why he tried to make sure of me."

"Well, even so," expostulated Martin, "though I can't believe it—even so that makes us, surely, less responsible than ever. If he knew before we did . . ."

"I can't explain it," said Margaret wearily. "I just know, that's all."

Martin sighed impatiently. "You're not fair to yourself or to me," he said. "You've too much conscience about him."

She did not answer that, and for a few minutes they were both silent. It was Martin who spoke first.

"However," he said, "we have decided to try once more. When shall we begin? To-night?"

"No," said Margaret. "We must let him have this bout. He has only just begun again, badly. Last night, I think, was the beginning. He'd only been drinking comparatively moderately before that. And if we are to have any chance at all, we must let him make himself ill again, and catch him just when he is near a reaction. I shall know. It may be a week or a fortnight. For that time we shall just have to take no notice of him. Give him every chance. Let him hang himself. I believe it's the only way."

"And then organize another combined attack on former lines?"

"Yes. Do you think you can bear a fortnight of it?"

"I can bear anything for you," said Martin.

And when he kissed her she did not forbid him. They were together all that day. Robin did not come in until after eleven o'clock, and they did not sit up for him.

2

Margaret's plan was well laid in some respects. If their second attack upon Robin was to have the least chance of success, they must wait for the critical moment when his defences were temporarily down. Now, at the beginning of his new bout, he was little better than a maniac with a single overmastering obsession. He was manifestly beyond the power of reason. His period of abstinence, once it was terminated, had left him more ravenous for alcohol; so ravenous, indeed, that he hardly troubled to disguise his condition. He was held in utter subjection by the old spirit that had for a time been driven into some dim retreat, but had now returned to the swept and garnished house more powerful than ever before.

The day after the scene in the study, he did not return

home till nearly midnight, and all the following day, Sunday, he never stirred from his own room.

The other two lighted a fire in the deserted drawing-room that day; they wanted to be together, and they dared not talk in the study.

During the two weeks that followed they were seldom inconvenienced by Robin's presence. On more than one occasion he stayed out all night, and hardly troubled to invent an excuse for his absence when he returned. When he slept at Garroch he remained in bed until mid-day and left the house without speaking to either Margaret or Martin.

But if they saw little of him during those two weeks, the spirit of evil moved ceaselessly about the house. It seemed that Garroch never nodded now that the master might be home at any hour of the day or night.

And when he slept there, the nights were full of horror. They would hear him shouting on the landing in the small hours of the morning. Once he made an effort to invade Hester's room, and the next day Martin besought Margaret always to keep her door locked.

She smiled. "I always do," she said, and added, "I've known him nearly as bad as this before. It won't last much longer."

Yet, despite the horror and terror of those two weeks, Martin was not looking forward with a single heart and mind to the end of this terrible outburst. He dreaded, then, the inevitable corollary of defeat. If he failed, he thought, he must leave the house, and he was uncertain, notwithstanding his boast, whether he would be able to compel Margaret to accompany him.

One thing, however, gave him cause for hope. She had sent Biddie away to stay with her grandmother in Scotland. There was reason enough for her going, that house was no fit place for a child, but the road for Margaret's own departure had been cleared by Biddie's absence.

Robin, himself, was presumably still unaware that

his child had been sent away. He had not asked for her; it may be that he recognized his own unfitness to meet her at that time, lost as he was to all other sense of decency.

And with Biddie and Robin both out of the house, Martin and Margaret were inevitably thrown together. He had no specific work in hand now—the manuscript of the book on Socialism had gone to the typists—and although he made some pretence of writing in the morning, making notes for his little monograph on the Godwins, the greater part of his day was spent with Margaret.

She no longer rebuked or opposed him. Her engagement to Robin was manifestly at an end. For although Robin himself had made no further allusion to it, there was little doubt that the omission was due to his preoccupation with an intenser interest. To him, at that time, Margaret was plainly no more than a source of slight irritation, a feeble check upon his one overwhelming desire.

So Margaret and Martin drew very near to each other between the disturbances of that harassing fortnight. She leaned upon him, found consolation in his strength, and not only sang to him that song of Schubert's, but also, in tender moments addressed him as *mein Ruh'*.

She had had no further attack of nervous prostration after that scene in the study. She was deliberately resting herself, saving all her energy for the final outpouring of vitality that would become necessary when Robin was come to the end of his bout.

There were moments, indeed, when Martin believed that she was ready to abandon that final attack; to leave Garroch and go to Scotland, where he might shortly join her, and where they might be married. They had over £200 a year between them even if Martin earned nothing, and they were prepared to face matrimony on that income.

And one afternoon, when the fortnight was nearly run, he went so far as tentatively to make the proposition. They were in the drawing-room—March had come in with soft winds and warm sunshine, and they did not need a fire. He had always more courage, more singleness of purpose in that little drawing-room.

"I suppose he will have a temporary reaction after all this," Martin said, suddenly introducing the one essential topic that was never long absent from their thoughts. "It isn't possible, is it, that he will go steadily on, drinking himself to death?"

Margaret shook her head without conviction.

The previous night had been one long horror from one o'clock until nearly six in the morning. Robin had begun by going to the pantry to look for wine, and although Martin, hearing the crash of crockery, had followed him and persuaded him first into the study and afterwards to bed, he had been out on the landing again half an hour later, crying and shouting, banging on the bedroom doors.

"He couldn't get much worse than he was last night," Martin continued. "I had a pretty fair doing, altogether."

"Poor darling," she said. "I know. You were up nearly all night, weren't you?"

She had come out once, herself, and been resolutely driven back to her room by Martin.

He smiled and sat down beside her on the window-seat. The casement was wide open and the little wind that blew into the room was fragrant with the scent of warm damp earth.

It was the wind that nearly upset Martin's ethical balance.

"But if he didn't get any better," he persisted, "what would you do?"

"Go away, I suppose," she admitted.

"You wouldn't tackle him, when he's like this?"

"It wouldn't be any use."

"How long shall we give him?"

She was playing with the thought, surrendering herself to the mood of the March earth. "I don't know," she said carelessly.

"Another fortnight of this would knock you up altogether," he said tenderly. He was holding her hand and drew her gently towards him.

"I think it would," she admitted.

"And we might be sitting in the heather, under the open sky; just you and I alone," he said.

"Don't," she rebuked him.

"Without a care in the world," he added, saying one word too much.

"Without a care?" she asked, and gently drew away from him. "And knowing that we hadn't tried to save him at the last?"

He got up and paced the little length of the room.

"Oh! I know you are right," he said. "We have got to make one more effort." But he was uncertain whether he would have insisted upon the necessity, if she had been willing to go away with him.

"One final effort," he repeated, emphasizing an important qualification. "If that fails we can't do any more."

She agreed to that, and he dare not ask her what would follow, if they succeeded.

"But we must not anticipate failure," she added, half-heartedly. "We are not doing this just to ease our consciences."

"Oh! no, of course not," returned Martin with an equal lack of conviction.

XXIII. THE JUDGMENT OF ROBIN GREG.

I

ROBIN came home earlier that evening.

The other two were in the study, and after he had taken his coat off in the hall, he opened the study door, stood on the threshold for a moment staring at them, and then turned and went upstairs.

Margaret jumped up. "Can I do anything for you, Robin?" she called after him. But he went straight up to his own room and slammed and locked the door after him, without attempting to reply.

"What is it now?" asked Martin.

"I believe the bout is nearly over," Margaret said.

"Well, everything is ready," remarked Martin. They had sent for another treatment of the "Antol" cure by post. Martin had shrunk from meeting Cecil Barker with a confession of failure.

"Perhaps to-morrow . . ." whispered Margaret.

Martin nodded, and they hardly spoke again before they said "Good night." The sense of the desperate adventure before them weighed too heavily for speech.

And they were to carry that weight for nearly three days ere they could find the relief of action.

The next day, a Saturday, Robin was out of the house soon after ten o'clock, and when he returned at half-past four in the afternoon, he went up to his own room again and locked himself in.

Margaret's knocking and repeated questions as to whether he would like some dinner sent up to him elicited no response; but any doubts they might have had as to his safety were resolved by the sound of his footsteps clearly audible in the room below.

"We must wait till to-morrow," Margaret said, and

they sat far apart all the evening and talked little. Martin corrected the typescript of the book. They were not sure that he might not surprise them suddenly at any moment.

Their sleep was undisturbed that night, and all the next day, Sunday, they had no sight of him. Indeed, it was not until the evening that he gave any sign of being alive. But at seven o'clock he rang his bell.

Margaret answered it.

"What is it you want, Robin?" she asked through the locked door.

"Ye might send me up something to eat," he replied, and added, "Ye can put it down outside."

"What's he up to?" asked Martin, when he and Margaret were at supper. "D'you suppose he's ill?"

"Yes. Nothing to worry about, I think," she said. "He ate some of the beef I sent him. He put the tray out again when he had finished. I believe he's fairly sober."

"Perhaps to-morrow..." suggested Martin grimly.

They were both longing to get it over. They had neither of them been out for two days.

And on Monday the door upstairs still remained locked. The house was in suspense. Even Hester stole quietly from room to room, and looked at Margaret with something of doubt in her face.

"Maybe he will be vairy sick?" she asked once, and seemed unsatisfied by Margaret's assurance that the master of the house was certainly not seriously ill. Hester was accustomed to the vagaries of her employer when he was drinking, but these three days behind a locked door had a significance outside her experience.

He had, however, eaten a little breakfast that morning.

At lunch, Martin tried to persuade Margaret to come out for a walk. It was not a promising afternoon, the soft airs of Friday had been succeeded by a north-east wind, and the thin driving rain was streaked with wet snow.

She looked out of the window and shook her head. "I'd love to," she said, "but I daren't. It wouldn't do for him to come down and find us out together."

"Well, you go," suggested Martin. "I'll stay in and watch."

"I'd sooner you went," she returned, and stopped his protestations by adding, "Don't argue about it, please, Martin. Trust me to know what's the best thing to do."

She could always subdue him when she took that tone. She made him feel young and insignificant, altogether unworthy to be so wonderfully honoured by her.

"Why shouldn't I stay in too?" he asked humbly.

"Because I would sooner you went out," she said.

"I don't like to leave you . . ." he began, but she cut him short by saying sharply:

"Don't be silly." Her nerves were beginning to give way.

"Of course, I'll go if you want me to," he said a little sulkily.

"I do," she returned with decision.

He went an unhappy walk up to the Common, the first time he had been there alone for over a month.

When he returned, Margaret met him in the hall. She put up her hand at once to enjoin silence and led him into the dining-room.

"He's in the study," she whispered. "He came down an hour ago and asked for Biddie. I told him she had gone to stay with mother, and he took it quite well, and then . . ." She caught her breath and leaned against the sideboard. Martin saw that she was trembling violently.

"I say, you're ill," he said. He came closer to her and put his arm round her.

"No, no, I'm not. I can do very well, yet," she said, but she clung to him, and for a moment she could not speak, so shaken was she by the tremor of her over-tired nerves.

"I've spoken to him," she said at last, and made a strong effort to stop the trembling of her limbs. "D-don't interrupt, Martin. Listen. It was no good. B-but you must try." She stammered and fought to speak her words, even as she fought to command the trembling of her body. "T-try, won't you? For all you're w-worth, Martin?"

"For all I'm worth," he said resolutely.

"Then go now," she urged him.

"But what about you, darling?" He held her very tightly, as if he feared that she might slip from him.

"I'll lie down. I'm all right now," she said. And indeed, she gently pushed him away and stood steadily without support. "I'll go upstairs," she continued.

He followed her into the hall, and watched her safely into her room; then he took off his wet overcoat, and after one moment of hesitation walked boldly into the study.

2

Greg sat in his arm-chair. He was wearing a dressing-gown over his pyjamas, his hair was tousled, and he had not shaved for three days. He looked gray and tired; his head drooped, his whole attitude expressed prostration.

He did not look up when the door opened, and Martin came in and sat down without speaking. He was oppressed by a horrible sense of the futility of the things he had come there to express, and, also, by his remembrance of having been through precisely the same scene before. His mission appeared hopeless, and more enervating still, it appeared stale and foolish. His mind was endlessly repeating a single sentence: "For all I'm worth." But he could find nothing to say; he had said everything he had to say three months ago.

It was Greg who spoke first.

"Well," he said quietly, "will ye not begin? I'll be glad to get it by."

Martin leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees, his cheeks on his knuckles. It came to him that if he could recall some shadow of the old affection he had felt for this man, he might still cherish some faint hope of success. If he could lose himself, find happiness in the thought of sacrifice . . . He found himself staring at Greg's hand that hung limply over the arm of the chair, and the hand was stained and dirty, the nails long and black.

"You know what I've come to say," he said weakly, staring disgustedly at that unwashed hand.

"Aye. I know it very well," replied Greg without looking up. "Ye see I've just heard it all from Maggie, and unless ye've agreed to play different parts, ye'll only be repeatin' all she's said already."

"Surely it isn't a question of any agreement," stammered Martin. "We both want to help you—anyone would."

"Oh! ay; ye're very generous," mumbled Greg.

"It isn't a matter of *generosity*," expostulated Martin.

"Ay, but it is," returned Greg. "Ye're surely standin' in yer own light, Bond. With me out of yer way, now, there'll be nothing to come between ye and Maggie."

Whatever his repugnance, Martin saw that he must deny any understanding of this kind between himself and Margaret. If that were confessed he could have no authority; he must admit one of two things; either that he was willing to give up Margaret to Greg if the latter once more essayed the taking of the "cure"; or that Greg must renounce all hope of her. Neither position seemed tenable to Martin, and he saw no way of escape save by a denial of his relations with Margaret.

"I don't know what you mean by that," he said, leaning back into the shadow of his arm-chair. "I'm nothing to Miss Hamilton."

"Ye surprise me," said Greg, in the same dull,

uninterested voice. "I would have thought ye were likely to get married as soon as maybe."

"Oh, Lord! no." Martin's denial sounded, even to himself, fatally hollow and unreal.

"Och! then I must take yer word for it," replied Greg, his tired eyes still fixed in a weary stare at the fire. "But at the same time, Bond, as a connexion and an old friend of Maggie's I must say that I think ye will be actin' very dishonourably if ye do not marry her after all."

"After all what?" asked Martin, astonished and a little frightened.

Greg gave a weak shrug and made a tentative gesture with his dirty hand. "I'd not like to be too precise in that matter," he said.

"You don't mean to imply . . ." began Martin, warmly.

"Ye must just fit the cap yerself," Greg interrupted him calmly. "I have implied no more than ye're able to understand, it seems. If yer conscience pricks ye, maybe ye'll see proper to do the right thing by her."

For a moment the blood went to Martin's head. "Look here," he said fiercely, "if you dare to insinuate a word against Miss Hamilton, by God, I'll half kill you."

Greg chuckled. "Ye could do no more," he said, "for I'm half dead already."

Martin could not doubt that. The man looked such a poor, feeble thing, drooping there in his deep chair; violence was out of the question, he looked frailer than any woman.

He waited for a few seconds, and then as Martin made no reply, he continued. "But physical strength will be yer strong point, Bond. When it comes to wrestlin', ye're bonnie. 'Twas that, no doubt, that caught Maggie. Women just admire that sort of strength in a man."

Martin bit his nails, a sudden reversion to a school habit. He had bitten his nails when he was reproved by

his form-master. "I don't see what all this has got to do with it," he said sullenly. "Why should you drag Miss Hamilton into it? What I want to know is whether you'll take the cure again?"

"Och! ye're a wonderful persuasive pleader," remarked Greg with the faintest echo of a hoot. "I'm hard put to it to withstand the force of yer eloquence, Bond. But I'd be glad, however, if ye'd just permit me to say a word. Have I yer permission?"

"If it's about the cure . . ." mumbled Martin.

"Ay, it is about that," said Greg, and for the first time, he moved his head and threw a glance at his companion. "I'd just like to explain to ye precisely why yer Miss Hamilton has much more to do with it than ye have yerself," he said. "Ye see I'm a Scotchman, and some people would likely call me a sentimentalist. I'd not deny it. I have no call to be ashamed of it. And Maggie has stood for more to me than just any other woman could. She's Scotch, too, for one thing; but more, she's a part of the life that meant happiness for me. She's like Elsie in some ways, though she has not Elsie's spirit nor her courage, and her voice reminds me of my puir wife . . ." He had dropped his head and his words were barely audible. He seemed to have forgotten Martin's presence in the room, and to be indulging himself in a spoken reverie. "Ay, Elsie would have wished it," he murmured. "I ken that. She'd just hae said 'Puir old boy.' She would have understood me; aye, she'd have understood vairy well that I'd need love and maybe more than my fair share of admiration. She gave it to me, hersel' . . ." He lapsed into silence and a tear trickled slowly down his unshaven cheek, and was lost in the bristles of his beard.

Martin sat quite still. Neither of them spoke again for more than a minute. Then Greg heaved a long sigh and looked up with a faint start. "Ye were sayin'?" he asked, with a look of bewilderment.

"I didn't speak," replied Martin, "but I want you to

have another try; to begin all over again. Won't you have a try, old man. We'll help you."

Greg roused himself, he lifted his arms and yawned. "Och! I'll have heard that before," he said in a bored voice. "Why will ye be startin' that cant all over again? Why, for Heaven's sake, don't ye go off with Maggie and leave me to mysel'. I'll not be wantin' either of ye."

"I don't want to go off," said Martin, with an assumption of firmness. "We both want to stay here and help you."

"Och! I couldn't be a party to such a scandalous arrangement," said Greg, with a hoot. "It wouldn't be proper, I'm thinkin'. Nae, nae, laddie; ye must take her away and marry her."

But Martin was not to be put off again. He saw, now, the trap that was set for him. "Well, if you prefer it, I will go away," he said, "but I must stay until you have taken the cure again."

"Hoo! hoo!" laughed Greg. "I'd not leave ye two in the house for another three weeks on any consideration. I'd not have it on my conscience."

"Very well, I'll go away at once," said Martin. "The point is, will you take the cure?"

"I will not."

"You must."

Greg shifted in his chair uncomfortably. For a moment Martin believed that in spite of all he was winning.

"You must," he repeated.

3

"Ay, laddie, I must, must I?" Greg turned suddenly and looked Martin full in the face. "And ye'll make me, will ye? Eh! but ye're a fine lad. Now, just sit ye quiet and listen to me. I'll be frank with ye. We'll have no more haverin' and hairsplittin' about this, but a fair

talk as man to man; though ye're hardly worth the name in some ways, and I'm more than a match for ye when it does not come to wrestlin'."

Martin opened his mouth, but closed it again without speaking. Greg's old personality had reasserted itself, all his old dominance and compelling power were summoned for this final defence of his; for the defence that by excellent generalship he turned into a counter attack.

"Nay, ye've had yer say, such as it is," he continued, "and now I'll have mine; and when I've finished ye'll see vairy plainly just why I'll *not* take the cure, and why ye'll make it convenient to leave my house to-morrow mornin'."

"Well, go on," said Martin, bracing himself. It was all over. He had done his best. Greg might say anything he liked now. Martin, with a swift glance back over the last three months, saw nothing for which he could be blamed.

"Ye were a decent enough lad when ye first came," said Greg, "I liked ye, I thought ye were honest and straightforward; and I was pleased with the way ye tackled yer work, and yer loyalty to me in that Wotter-hoose business. I flatter myself I'm a good judge of character, but it seems I was mistaken in this instance."

"Why?" asked Martin, flushed and miserable.

"Och! I found ye out. I saw ye were makin' love to Maggie behind my back; hidin' it to me and pretendin' to my face that ye only had my welfare at heart, while all the time ye were tryin' to seduce the woman I was engaged to. Och! hold yer tongue, will ye. I know ye'll deny it. Ye're the sort that thinks it a fine thing to pretend to uphold what ye call the honour of a woman, after ye've done all ye can to steal it away from her. Aye! and I ken well, too, that ye've deceived yerself about yer own virtues. Ye've never once had a wrong thought of her, ye'd say, and maybe, in one way, it would be true enough. But that is only because ye're so full of the cant of yer class. If Maggie had not been what she is, a

cold Scotchwoman at bottom, despite what she believes to be her 'temperament,' ye'd have fallen fast enough. 'Twas not yer ideals, my lad, that saved ye. Maggie would have been your mistress before this, if she'd been warmer. Och! I ken it well and ye know it yerself. Ye'd not have denied her if she had offered herself. However, that temptation is not likely to upset ye." He stopped for a moment and hooted on a high note of irony.

"So ye see, Bond, the mere fact that ye have not actually fallen, does not in itself recommend ye to me. What I've seen, and what I'll remember, is that ye have played me false almost from the beginning. I've known this long time that ye'd not have stayed in the house to save *me* from trouble. Ye have stayed to protect Maggie. Aye! wasn't it that? I can see ye ken the answer. Ye'd *protect* her, eh? from the man she was engaged to, from the man that ye pretended was yer friend, and that ye wanted to save from the hell of drink? D'ye not think that that was a grand way of savin' him? D'ye not know in yer heart that if ye'd gone away two months syne, I'd not be where I am now? Nae doubt, ye believed ye were doin' the best thing for Maggie. But who made ye the judge o' that? D'ye think ye know her as well as I do, who've watched her all these years? Whisht! man, I tell ye, I can read her like a book; and I know that if she'd not been dandlin' her silly little sentimental affection for yer strength, and yer good looks, and what she thought was yer devotion—a' so beautiful and flatterin' to her little vanity—she'd have made me a good enough wife, and been happy with Biddie and maybe children of her own later. 'Twas just her physical aversion, as she thought, that she could not overcome, but she'd have overcome it fast enough if she had not fancied herself in love with a handsome laddie who was always on his knees to her.

"So ye see, Mr Martin Bond, that at the end of it, I've little enough to thank ye for, and small reason for listenin' to ye, when ye begin to talk about beginnin' it

all over again. The first time I had some respect for ye both, and ye helped me. But now, I've no more regard for ye than I have for a pair of silly children. So get ye gone out of my house and leave me to myself. I'll do well enough without the pair of ye. Aye, if ye'd gone less than a month ago, I might hae managed; but ye so fretted me with yer deceptions, and yer posin' and yer spyin' that I fairly had to drink to forget how I disliked ye.

"Now then, Mr Bond, d'ye understand the position?"

It was all so specious, it wore such an aspect of undeniable truth. Martin sunk into his chair, saw all too clearly how his conduct might indeed wear just that construction which had been put upon it. One little thought alone saved him from utter loss of self-esteem: he realized that those concluding sentences wore the air of a peroration. Was the whole speech prepared, he wondered; was it the result of many weeks' cogitation? Had it not been delivered? As Greg had lost himself, he had fallen into the habit of gesticulation, making his clear-cut points with a thrust of that grimy forefinger.

"It isn't fair," said Martin in a low voice. "It isn't fair."

"Eh, well, fair or not, it's the truth as I see it," replied Greg. He had relapsed again into his former position and the energy seemed to have been drained out of him. "And what's maybe more to the point is that this is my house, and I'll thank ye and Maggie to get out of it."

"But . . ." began Martin.

"Och! for God's sake, go, boy," snapped Greg. "I'm sick of ye."

And Martin rose deliberately from his chair and went out.

He went upstairs. Margaret's door was wide open and she was kneeling on the floor packing her trunk. She did

not lift her head when Martin paused on the threshold, but said,

"I know, I know. You've done your best."

He saw that she had been crying.

"Margaret," he said and his own voice broke, "We haven't been as bad as he makes out."

She rose to her feet. "Oh! my poor old boy, what has he been saying to you?" she asked, and she came to him and put her arms round him. He cried also, then, on her breast, without shame.

Presently she told him that she was going to catch the midnight train from King's Cross, and gave him her address in Scotland.

"I'll come, too," he said. "I'll go back to my boarding house for a time."

"Yes, for a time," she agreed. But neither of them cared at that moment to make any arrangements for the future.

5

They did not see Robin again.

Martin fetched a cab from the station, and a little after ten o'clock they left Garroch for ever.

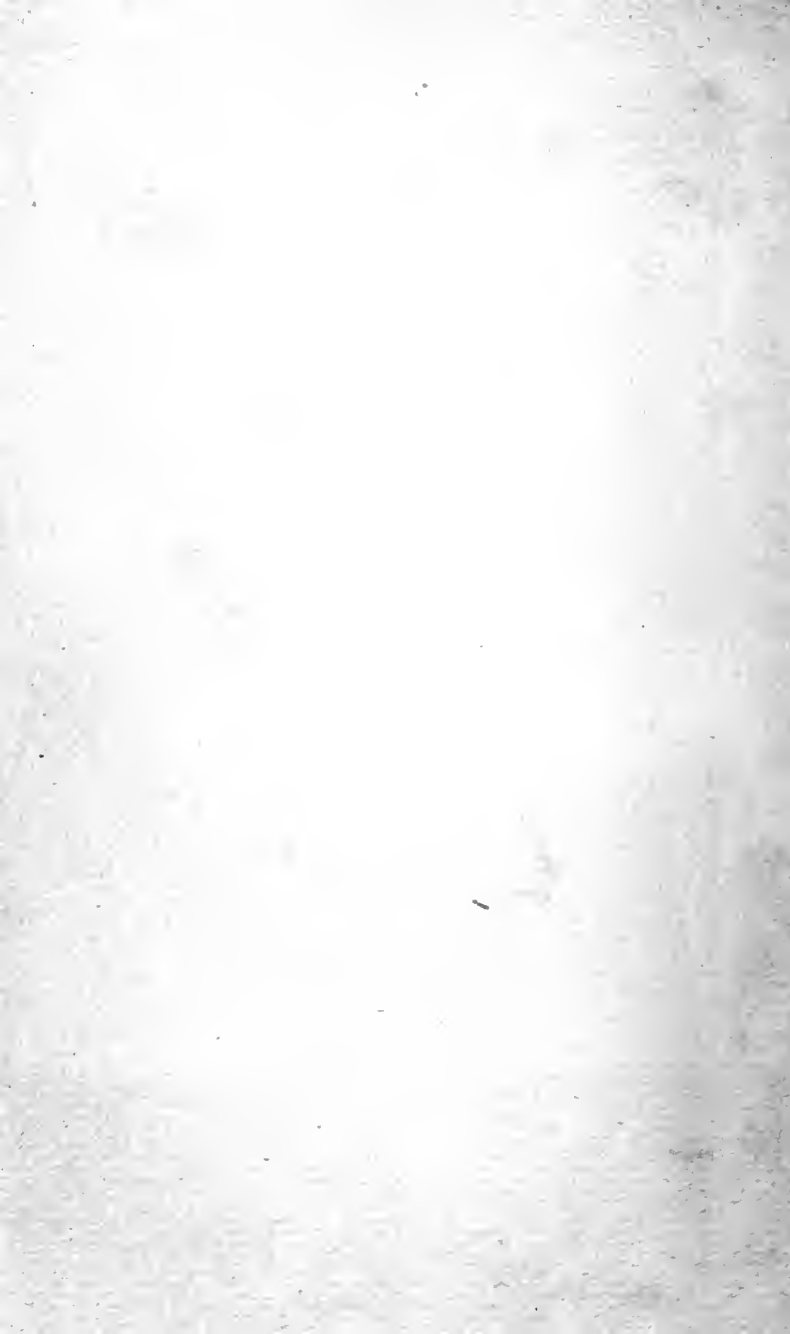
Hester had said that she would stay on.

When the luggage had been put in the cab Martin looked back at the dim face of the house, visible in the light of the tall arc lamp that stood on the opposite side of Demetrius Road.

Then moved by a sudden impulse, he bent over the gate and pressed the latch down into the hasp.



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